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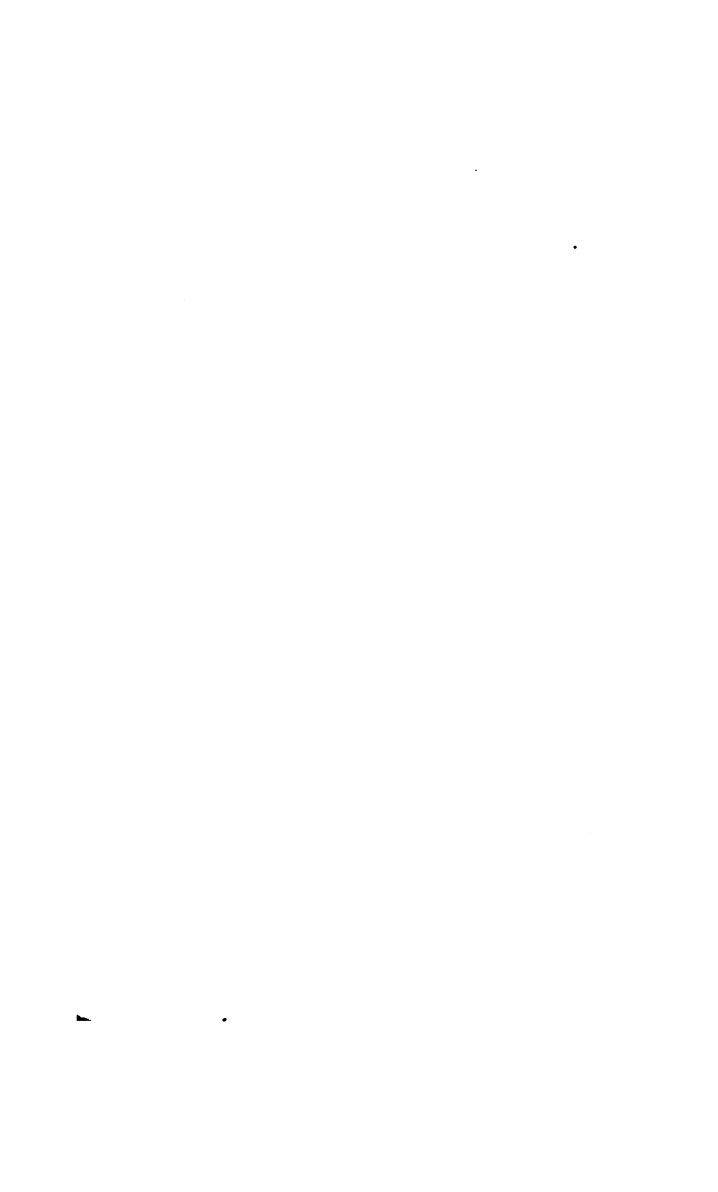
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ROOT OF THE MATTER.

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THE

ROOT OF THE MATTER.



THE
ROOT OF THE MATTER;

OR,
THE VILLAGE CLASS.



LONDON:
JOSEPH MASTERS, ALDERSGATE STREET,
AND 78, NEW BOND STREET.

1860.



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THE

ROOT OF THE MATTER.

Part I.

CHAPTER I.

THE RETURN.

“WELL, my dear girls, I am truly glad to find myself among you again ; how are you all ?”

“Quite well, thank you, ma’am : how are you ? It has seemed a long time since you left us.”

“So, indeed, it has to me ; and I am thankful to return to you now so much stronger and better.”

Such were the mutual inquiries and response between a lady and a group of village girls, who had assembled together after church, and were waiting at the gate to greet her on the first Sunday after her return from a somewhat long absence, rendered necessary by health. Miss Bentinck (for such was the lady’s name) had for some years given them instruction as a class, after leaving the parish school. Some were

still desirous of keeping up what they had gained there, whilst others, having been more needed by their parents at home, and therefore unable to attend the school regularly, were glad to avail themselves of this opportunity to make amends for former lack of learning. They met twice a-week at Miss Bentinck's house ; and although they were of various ages and degrees of advancement, it was not difficult to find subjects of interest, both sacred and common, on which they all needed further instruction. One book in particular was much liked by all,—“ Stories and Catechisings.”* The story parts were especially popular, and the two volumes were in constant request among such as were occasionally hindered from coming, “to read up before next time ;” and great was the outcry if, as sometimes happened, the borrower was also a defaulter, and failed to bring it back again by the appointed day. Such books, with some Scripture history readings, and lives of the Apostles, formed an interesting and instructive course, varied by writing, summing, and spelling ; and Miss Bentinck was pleased to see her girls not only animated by a friendly spirit among themselves, but also increasing in sound religious feeling, and more regular in attendance at Church.

On her return after so long an absence she felt anxious to know something of the progress of her scholars, and to renew her work with

* *Edited by the Rev. W. Jackson; a most valuable as well as interesting book.*

them : this was in their minds also, as she soon became aware by their looks and whispers.

"Do you think Miss Bentinck will begin the class again?"

"Who will ask her?"

"I hear, I hear," answered she, smiling ; "I'm quite as anxious to begin again as any of you can be, and will do so next Friday, if that will suit you all."

Some arrangements were then made, to fix a time when the girls could most easily be spared from home ; for Miss Bentinck was always anxious to impress upon them that next to their duty to God was that to their parents, whom they should serve with all diligence and willingness, and thus make them every possible return of gratitude and affection. Her pupils were not all assembled on the present occasion ; she therefore sent messages to the absent by those who lived near them, or were going in their direction : some she met with herself next day. One of these, who had been among the best conducted, and of whom she had many hopeful and pleasant thoughts, seemed glad to see her ; but on the proposed renewal of the class being mentioned, drew herself up a little, and said,—

"I think, ma'am, we are getting almost too old for any more schooling."

Miss Bentinck felt a little hurt at this unexpected rebuff ; but she answered quietly, "I don't know why you should call it *schooling*, Clara ; and as to being too old to learn, that cannot be at any age ; I am sure *I* shall never feel that *I* have done learning."

She paused, and looking again at Clara, observed more fully what had struck her even at first sight, that Clara was much more smartly dressed than formerly, though always a little inclined to it. Miss Bentinck had often noticed it to her, and especially at the time of her Confirmation, when she had earnestly recommended her to forego a very dressy cap and bonnet, which she had provided for the occasion, and which her mother (a plain, simple minded woman) equally disliked. She was sorry, therefore, to see this silly and dangerous taste growing upon her. Perhaps her countenance betrayed her thoughts; for Clara looked a little abashed, and seemed in a hurry to move off, which Miss Bentinck perceived, and said,—

“If you are going towards home, Clara, I will walk a little way with you;” and then pursued the subject. “I think (she continued) the real reason is, not that you are *too old*, but a little *too fine*, to come.”

Now Clara was an affectionate-hearted girl, and had hitherto seemed grateful for the pains bestowed upon her; and she replied,—

“No indeed, ma’am, it isn’t that; but I expect you will find most of the others think so too.”

“Well, Clara, I shall not accept this as your final answer; take a little time to consider of it, and let me hear again: I shall soon find out the opinion of the most sensible of my girls; and you know that I have always *hitherto* reckoned you among my best.”

Clara seemed touched, and as if she intended

to give the matter a wiser consideration ; so Miss Bentinck only added, that they should meet on the following Sunday after church ; and she could then give her final answer. Meanwhile she had seen some of the others, who were most glad to renew their pleasant evenings of study, and gave in their names as attendants at the class. Sunday came, and Miss Bentinck looked out after church for the expected meeting, hoping that good sense would have gained the day. A little way off she saw Clara, with two more of her former pupils, whom she had not seen since her return : she advanced to meet them, and said,—

“ Well, have you made up your minds ? ”

“ Please, ma’am,” said Clara, “ we most of us feel the same ; we think we *are* too old to come to school any longer.”

“ Well,” answered Miss Bentinck, “ I am sorry for it ; but since it is so I cannot help it : those who do not like to come must stay away : but you, Harriet,” added she, turning to the youngest with a smile, “ surely you don’t think yourself too old to learn ? ”

“ No, ma’am,” answered Harriet, “ I should be glad to come again, if you please.”

“ Very well, we begin next Friday, and I shall be glad to see you with the rest.”

So saying, she turned towards home with a sigh of regret for the others ; for it is always sad to lose sight of any in whose well-being one has felt a deep interest. A few days afterwards, she had occasion to call on Harriet’s mother, and among other things the conversation turned upon

the class. Miss Bentinck had supposed that Harriet's eldest sister, who was also walking with Clara when she finally declined, was of the same mind, and thought herself too old, as she did not speak like Harriet; but the mother seemed to be glad of this opening, and said,—

“That was one thing, ma'am, which I wished to speak to you about: Ellen is very sorry that Clara should have said what she did; and, indeed, she feels that she had no *right* to speak *for others* in that way: she would like to attend the class again, as well as Harriet: and I too should be thankful for her to do so; she has had but few such chances of learning, and I am always pleased when she can gain more.”

Miss Bentinck was much rejoiced to hear this; and although she felt that it would have been better if Ellen had at once said, “Oh, Clara, don't say so; speak for yourself: *I don't* feel that, and would rather come again;” yet she considered that she was a shy girl, and perhaps felt unwilling to contradict her companion on the instant. “Ellen is at home,” added the mother, “and would like to see you herself, if you can wait a minute.” Harriet ran up to call her sister, who soon made her appearance. Miss Bentinck shook hands with her, and said she was glad to find that she was not of the party who thought themselves too old to learn.

“No, ma'am, indeed I don't,” said Ellen, “and it wasn't right of Clara to say so.”

“Well then,” said Miss Bentinck, “let us think no more about it, and I shall hope to see *you with the others.*”

Friday came, and with it a little group of bright loving faces, and willing hearts and hands, ready to try again their skill in penmanship, and to show that they had kept up some practice, and were even improved since they last met. Alas for the willing hands, no pen-holders were forthcoming; plenty of good steel tips,—and holders ordered, but not yet come. Well, they should be ready for next time; and as the girls had somehow come rather late on this their first muster, and there was not much time left before Evening Service, it was agreed that they should confine themselves for once to their Scripture history reading, and leave the usual sums and writing for the next time;—although these were usually a favourite part of the proceedings, and vied in popularity even with the “Stories.” The Scripture history books were soon produced, and the girls stood round the table, reverently waiting for the few words of prayer with which they always began the lesson. They then sat down, and took up the thread of the history where they had left off. The simple style of the book,* and its nearness to the Scripture wording, brought it within reach of the least advanced of the party: and yet the fulness and faithfulness of detail made it clear and interesting to the elder ones also. To enliven their course of instruction, Miss Bentinck’s habit was occasionally to explain the subject before them by introducing, from general history, events which had happened at the

* “The Old Testament History.” By a Country Clergyman. Christian Knowledge Society.

same time in other parts of the world, or some interesting anecdote, which they had never heard before. Two or three short chapters, read and illustrated in this way, filled up the time till the church bells gave notice to stop : then, after a short prayer, the little party broke up.

CHAPTER II.

THE OLD OAK-TREE.

THIS renewal of intercourse, after having been interrupted for a time, brought with it a train of feelings both pleasurable and anxious; for much as Miss Bentinck rejoiced in the hope of being an instrument of good to her young friends, she could not but mourn over the empty places of those who thought themselves above learning. She grieved over Clara, in whom she had felt a special interest; the more so because, since her Confirmation, she had become a constant communicant; and this unwillingness to learn showed want of humility, as also her growing love for dress bespoke vanity. The only two others she missed were Susan and Louisa. For Susan's absence, indeed, she could account: she was one who had often caused her some uneasiness, being a girl of a stubborn and difficult disposition, coming only as it suited her inclination, and readily making excuses for staying away. Miss Bentinck found, on inquiry, *that Louisa was now seldom at home, being*

pretty constantly employed in the neighbouring town with an elder sister, who was "learning the dress-making." This was a sufficient reason for her absence, though Miss Bentinck could not help regretting her choice of a business, so often the means of turning young girls' minds to dress and vanity; and especially as her elder sister, Lucy, was herself somewhat given to finery. *She* also had formerly been one of the class, and had some time since gone to service; which, however, she had now left, and "taken to the millinery and dress-making" instead, in which her younger sister had followed her. Both had become communicants, as well as Clara, and seemed at one time to give promise of right purpose: but alas! they had now gone out of sight, into a parish less well cared for, with fewer opportunities of grace. This was a position of danger, where the enemy was busily spreading before their dazzled eyes the gay things of the world, promising to lead them on to pleasure and a merry life, if they would but tread with other companions the broad easy road that leadeth—whither? Alas! Miss Bentinck thought of her three silly children with sorrow, and often sighed heavily in secret over the increasing folly of the young people of the present day, and the ease with which they are led away by the love of dress and admiration. Her best comfort was in prayer for them, and she humbly hoped that in due time a gracious answer would be vouchsafed, and some way opened for her to gain over them an influence for good. She remembered that the Saviour has bid us "watch" as well as "pray," and anxiously

indeed did she watch for some opportunity; for she felt that she *must speak* to warn them; but, calling to mind the counsel of a wise and holy man, (who well knew how to deal with the souls of others,) to exercise zeal with discretion, she determined to await God's good time, and learn more and more to—

* * * * * “seek,
With thoughts in prayer and watchful eyes,
His seasons sent, wherein to speak,
And use them as they rise.”

Ere long such an opportunity did arise; for, walking one day in a lane which led to a retired part of the village, she met Clara and Louisa. They looked hot and tired, and she feared at first it would not prove a favourable moment for speaking to them; yet she was unwilling to let it slip, and at any rate would try,—especially because, owing to Louisa's constant absence with her sister in the town, she now saw her but seldom. She gave them a warm greeting, which was as warmly met on their part, for they both loved her; and though they looked a little abashed, and as if doubtful how she would meet them, they could not be otherwise than pleased to find her kindly feeling towards them unaltered.

“You look tired,” observed Miss Bentinck; “have you been walking far?”

“Yes, ma'am,” answered Clara, “I've been to the town to meet Louisa, who has got leave for a holiday.”

“Oh! that's very pleasant; how long may you stay, Louisa?”

“Mrs. Green said I might sleep at home to—

night, if I would mind to be back early in the morning."

"Well, that you can easily be in this bright summer weather, and gain a nice walk in the fresh morning, to give you spirit for your day's work."

"Yes, ma'am, it will be a deal pleasanter than walking like this in the heat of the day."

"It certainly is very hot," answered Miss Bentinck; "but see, there's a cool shady place under the old oak on the bank; suppose we were all to sit down there a little while, till you are rested."

The proposal was too pleasant to admit of any hesitation on the part of the girls, who had another half mile to go ere they could reach Louisa's home. Miss Bentinck seated herself on the grass between them, and they, by a sort of natural instinct, nestled up close to her on each side, as they had been used to do formerly in her walks with them; at which times she would generally take some pleasant book to read to them, whilst they all sat round to listen. Each placed a hand on her knee, and Louisa said, "Please, ma'am, are you quite well again, now? you don't look very strong yet."

"Yes, thank you, I am very well now; only a little tired, like you," added she, smiling; "and now tell me something about your new life, Louisa; how do you like it?"

"Oh, very well, thank you, ma'am. I do sometimes wish for home, certainly; and on fine summer afternoons the town does seem very hot and dusty: but I like my work; it is such pretty work,—easy, and pleasant too; and Mrs. Green

has such a nice good-natured set of girls; though she's a little sharp herself sometimes, if we don't get on quite so fast as she expects."

"Well, it's something to like one's work, certainly," said Miss Bentinck; "and there must be different trades in the world, or we should not get served: but it would never be *my* choice to pinch up bows, and crimp ribbons."

Both the girls laughed heartily at this; and Clara, gathering a little courage under the influence of Miss Bentinck's return to her usual open manner (which had of late been almost involuntarily checked towards them), looked up at her archly, and said, "Please, ma'am, if I may guess, I shouldn't think those sort of fancy things were ever much in your way."

"No, Clara, that's quite a true guess; they never were much so; but *I* can remember a time when I used to spend more in ribbons than I should like to do now."

"But, ma'am," interrupted Louisa, "is there any harm in buying a bit of ribbon to make oneself look tidy, or in making it up nicely when bought, if one pays honestly for it?"

"I should never feel that there was any harm in buying what was necessary to be *tidy*, or in taking pains to make it up well; it is the love of *smart things*, and the wish to set ourselves off to advantage, and to attract attention, that I think dangerous, and I may say wrong; for it certainly tends in a wrong direction, and often ends in much misery and sin."

The girls both looked grave for a moment, and then exclaimed, "Oh! but we wouldn't have a

much of it as that ;—only a little pleasure while we're young ; and, you see, if we don't dress pretty well, all the girls of our own age, and other people too, look down upon us."

"Silly people, I dare say, may do so; and that is one reason why I'm so sorry that you have gone to live amongst them, Louisa, and especially to a service where the very nature of your work leads to vanity."

"But, ma'am," said Louisa, growing warm in the defence of her profession, "people must have bonnets and caps, and dresses ; and if one is to learn a trade, it is surely best to learn it well. Mother thinks my being with Mrs. Green a great opportunity ; for she's a first-rate hand at millinery. I tell Clara I shall soon be the best work-woman of the two, though she has been nearly a year with the village dress-maker here."

"Well, well," answered Miss Bentinck, "don't try to draw Clara away too. I can't afford to lose all my young friends ; besides, according to your own showing, every place must have its own dress-maker and milliner."

"To be sure, that's true," said Louisa ; "but, ma'am, I really do want to persuade Clara to join us ; for I think we shall be losing one of our number soon."

Louisa looked a little confused, as if she felt that she had let slip something more than she ought. Miss Bentinck, however, took no notice of it, not wishing to ask questions, and feeling *sure that if it was anything which concerned one of her own girls, or likely to affect their interests,*

it would not be long in reaching her. Clara, who had been sitting quite silent during the latter part of the conversation, thinking over all that had been said, at length chimed in again; "Please, ma'am, let me ask you one question; do you think God would have made all things in the world so beautiful and fresh, and pleasing to the eye, if He did not like to look upon them as such, and mean us to take pleasure in them, too?"

"No, Clara; you are right, so far. I quite believe that God does take pleasure in seeing all things perfect in their kind; for we are told that when the work of creation was ended, 'He beheld all things that He had made, and behold they were very good:' and no doubt He also intended man to rejoice in them, and be thankful for the mercy and love which has so richly provided them. Nothing, to my mind, can more clearly prove this than the gift of flowers, which by their loveliness and perfume seem intended to be a special proof of His love, and to show that, as a tender Father, He delights to see His children pleased and happy; for most things were created for man's *use* and *comfort*, but the beauties of nature for mere *enjoyment*."

"Then, ma'am, is it wrong to like pretty things on ourselves and others, as well as on the trees and shrubs, and among the green grass?"

"That is quite another thing, Clara; *we ourselves*, whom God has created for Himself, should try to be as the flowers, pure, and sweet, and *fresh*; and our Blessed Lord bids us 'consider the lilies of the field;' but in giving them to us

as an example, it is for the very purpose of teaching us *not* to 'take thought for raiment;' for '*they* toil not neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' God's creating power raised man from the dust of the earth in full perfection, the last and best of all His works—glorious and faultless, both in body and in spirit; for 'He made man in His own image; in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them:' and if they had remained faithful to the law of their creation, in holy love and obedience to their Heavenly Father, there would have been no need of any additions of their own to make them more acceptable and seemly in the eyes of the Lord, or in each other's sight. It was only when 'sin came into the world, and death by sin,' that shame entered with it, and caused the need of clothing. God Himself, in pity towards their misery and confusion, made them 'coats of skins, and clothed them:' and can we look back upon this origin of dress, and yet turn it into a means of vanity and folly? Perhaps nothing would help you more to form a just idea of the poverty of such attempts to exalt our poor fallen nature in the eyes of others, than to look through a microscope at some of these 'pretty things,' of which you are so fond. A leaf of one of the lilies we were just speaking of, so looked at, is *indeed* lovely. The more you magnify any of the works of nature, the more their beauty shines forth; the commonest leaf, a blade of grass, a *sprig of moss*, or even a sparrow's feather,—one

and all would show the most delicate fibres, and exquisite perfection of form and colouring; for they are all the works of God. But if you take a small piece of ribbon, fine cambric, or lace, you will be surprised at the difference. Your bit of ribbon will no longer look so attractive; it will remind you only of a piece of coarse bunting, such as you may see hanging from the flag-staff, with the Union Jack; your cambric will look like the coarsest matting, to cover fruit trees; and your pattern of lace like a fisherman's net."

The girls seemed perfectly astonished, and after a few moments' pause exclaimed, "Oh, ma'am, I *should* like to see that."

"Well," answered Miss Bentinck, "I hope you may some day; I have often thought it would be a good plan to take some of you to see the great microscope in London, which magnifies things to this wonderful extent; and then you would understand more fully what I mean, how little even the choicest works of man will bear comparison with the least of the Creator's. But to return to our subject,—*there is* a sense in which it is right to take care of our outward apparel, namely, that we should be *neat and tidy*, as befits the children of God, that we may be such as He can look upon with pleasure. *Simplicity* should be our pattern, and though we are not compelled to wear, like our first parents, the skins of beasts, the most humbling form of clothing which could have been provided for them, we should at least be content with 'modest apparel,' and not desire changes of fashion, or *make it a matter* of adorning. The second point,

(if indeed it should not rather rank first,) is cleanliness, as a type of inward purity; for it is 'next to godliness,' as the good old saying has it. It is when people are not satisfied with these, that the danger of vanity and self-indulgence begins; and too often alas! the outward adorning well nigh stifles that "meek and quiet spirit," which should reign within, and "which is in the sight of God of great price."* You must, I am sure, feel with me, that this is no slight evil, or danger. A person so dressed often reminds me of some lines by one of our best Christian poets:—

'The heavenly mind may be indifferent to her house
of clay,
And spurn the hovel as beneath her care;
But how a body so fantastic, trim, and quaint
In its adornments and attire, *can* lodge a heavenly
mind,
Demands a doubt.'—COWPER.

"Oh, but I don't wish to be *fantastic*," exclaimed Clara; "I shouldn't like to make myself *peculiar*."

"Only because you would be quizzed, instead of being admired; you like to be *peculiarly* nice, and *remarkably* well dressed."

"Well, perhaps I do;" said Clara colouring a little.

"You like to be *trim*," pursued Miss Bentinck, (passing her finger under the edge of Clara's bonnet-curtain, adorned with three rows of pretty fringed trimming), "all this is *peculiarly trim*: how much may you have paid for it?"

* 1 Pet. iii. 4.

"It is only three-pence a yard, and each row only takes three-quarters of a yard."

"That is about seven-pence : and this elegant lace, all round the front edge of the bonnet, and this tuft of blue satin ribbon over your left ear, and the two corresponding ones inside, opposite to each eye ?"

Clara could not help laughing, in spite of herself ; but felt inwardly ashamed too ; she hid her face with both hands for a moment, and then looked up imploringly at Miss Bentinck, and said,—

"Oh ! please, ma'am, don't be so hard upon me."

"Well, dear child, I don't wish to be hard upon you : I only want to bring the facts of the case to a reasonable point of view in your own mind : you have some good sense, Clara, if you will but use it. Now help me to pass a fair judgment on the case : let us first hear the costs."

"Well, then," said Clara, "if you must know the worst, the bonnet altogether will cost seven shillings and sixpence ; and it's not dear either ; for Louisa got all the trimming at trade-price, and put it together for me herself."

"Very kind of her ; that saved you at least two shillings, we may suppose : but you say 'it *will* cost ;' is it not then yet paid for ?"

"Oh ! ma'am, please don't," pleaded Louisa, "she's going to pay for it the very first thing after she receives her next quarter."

"When I've paid off my new boots," whispered Clara ; "that *must* be cleared off first, Louisa ; for old Joe Jarvis won't wait any longer."

Miss Bentinck shook her head. "Ah," she said, turning to Clara, and smiling a little, but rather sadly, "I'm afraid you'll make but a poor case of it."

"That's one reason," interrupted Louisa, "why I want her to leave her present place, and come to us at Mrs. Green's. She would soon work out the price of the materials, and of her last new dress, too, which she had of her."

Miss Bentinck now looked really grave, hearing of a third debt contracted, and all for dress. "Really, my dear Clara," she said, "you don't know what you are doing; you are running yourself into difficulties greater than you can now foresee, by beginning this bad habit of getting into debt; and all to indulge the love of dress, which in this degree I *must* call *wrong*. Even if they were all paid for, the things you wear are quite unbecoming your station; and though you may fancy they win you admiration, you are much mistaken; for, to speak candidly, I have heard it remarked, 'there is Clara trying to make a lady of herself; but she never *will*; she *can't* do it with all her smart caps and bonnets.'

"Well, then, it was very rude of whoever said so," answered Louisa, indignantly, "and it's very bad taste too. *I've* heard several people say that Clara's very nice-looking, and much more genteel than Mrs. Dashwood even, with her carriage and footman."

"Handsome is that handsome does," answered Miss Bentinck; "I daresay Mrs. Dashwood pays *her coachman* and footman honestly. I know

she gives away a great deal in charity; and although she may not be fond of smart dress, I have seen instances of true Christian humility and forbearance in her conduct, of which I should be glad to see a little more in some of my younger friends."

Both felt this remark to be meant for themselves, and were silent.

"I have not yet asked after Lucy," (Louisa's elder sister), said Miss Bentinck, after a short pause, and wishing to relieve their embarrassment; "is she well?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, thank you, very well and happy; but I don't think she will be with us much longer. It's a bit of a secret; but I *must* just tell *you*: she is going to be married, and it is *that* which will make the gap in our number, which I want Clara to come and fill."

"Indeed!" said Miss B., "she is rather young to be married. Who is it to?"

"The son of Winks, the grocer: he is a very nice young man, and has the prospect of a good business; for he expects soon to be taken into partnership."

"That sounds well, in a worldly point of view: I hope he is steady and religious? Does he go to church regularly?"

"Yes, ma'am, he's generally there on Sunday afternoons,—at least when Lucy is; but if she's prevented by any thing, he generally stays away for a walk with her. She says herself she wishes he would go more for *the sake of the service*; and I *must* say that, when there, he is more taken up with looking at her than minding his book;

he says he can't keep his eyes off her pretty face."

"Ah!" said Miss Bentinck, "that's one evil result of those foolish little bonnets, which are only stuck on the back of your heads, and leave the face entirely exposed on all sides, as if to say, 'here I am, and you may see as much as you like.' I wonder what the early Christians would have said if any of their maidens had presented themselves in church, dressed out as for an exhibition! Do you not think that, when they were all assembled under a deep sense of the sanctity of the place, to worship and praise God, they would have been very sorry as well as surprised? To speak candidly, I must say some such thoughts passed through my own mind the very last time I saw Lucy in church. I hope, Louisa, you won't follow her example in that: to me it seems anything but pretty, and I couldn't help thinking how that nice-looking girl had spoilt her appearance, making herself look quite bold and impudent. How different from St. Paul's teaching, and to St. Peter's also, who says, that Christian women should adorn themselves with 'shamefacedness and sobriety.' Alas! there is but too little of that among the young people now-a-days."

There was a pause; the girls felt that they had no answer to give: but Louisa, anxious to defend her sister, and yet feeling the justice of Miss Bentinck's remarks, presently said, "Well, to be sure, I *do* think those small bonnets *are* a silly fashion; and I sha'n't be sorry when they're gone out; for the sun comes in one's eyes,

and strikes on the top of the head so; and when there's a cold wind, it often gives us the face-ache, or a touch of rheumatics before our time; yet we can't wear a poke when no one else does; we should be so quizzed. But, ma'am, let me speak a word for Lucy: indeed, she is a good girl, and tries all she can to make Thomas Winks religious. It's such a pity he is not more so; he's so pleasant and good-natured."

"It is, indeed, a sad pity," answered Miss Bentinck gravely, "and it's a bad beginning for a young wife to undertake the task of making her husband religious; it too often proves a fruitless attempt, and ends in his drawing her down to his low standard of principle, instead of her being able to raise him up to her's. You may be sure that, unless the love of God is the bond of union, there is but a poor chance of happiness for either. I grieve the more for Lucy, because I believe her to have many right feelings; but she has put herself in the way of temptation, and has, insensibly perhaps to herself, become quite altered in manner and appearance since she has lived in the town. She has no longer the quiet modest look she used to have; and I fear has less love for holy things, or she would never have consented to unite herself in the sacred and life-long bond of marriage to a young man of doubtful religious principles. It is not to judge hardly of her that I speak thus; for our Blessed Lord said, "Judge not;" but it is to warn you both of a like danger; for I *greatly* fear this will be anything but a happy marriage."

Both the girls seemed much struck with these remarks ; and Clara looked sad, as she thought of her friend, and said,—

“ Well, I always felt from the first that Thomas Winks was not one I could ever have cared for ; and I don’t think Lucy would some time ago ; for she used to talk so wisely about choosing a good, steady, sensible husband : we used to call her ‘ the oracle,’ and tell her she must set us a good example, and we would wait to see her model ; but I think she *has* been a little spoilt by the admiration she has met with since she lived in the town.”

“ Well then, my dear Clara,” said Miss Bentinck, “ since you allow that, why will *you* also seek the admiration which you confess has spoilt your friend ? ”

Clara coloured a little, but said, “ I don’t seek it, ma’am, exactly.”

“ Not consciously to yourself, perhaps ; but you *do really* seek it, if you put yourself in the way of it ; and it’s of no use to pray ‘ lead us not into temptation,’ if you run into it of your own accord, or suffer yourself to be led into it so readily.”

“ But is it wrong to wish to be liked by others, and to be thought agreeable ? ”

“ Not if they are such as you can respect. The good opinion of right-minded people is what every one *may* and *should* desire ; for it is a token of the approbation of the Righteous Lord Himself, and may be received humbly and thankfully, as a sign of the Spirit witnessing *with our spirit* that we are the children of

God ; it is a blessed and comforting bond of union that links together all true Christian hearts, and is indeed the only safe ground on which any true and lasting friendship or affection can be founded."

"That is just what I have often felt," said Clara, "only I can't express it so clearly ; and if I really thought I was running the risk of attracting any unworthy admirers by my blue bows and fringes, I would tear them all off my head this minute."

"Of course you run the *risk* of it," answered Miss Bentinck ; "if you dress as silly girls do, who *wish* for silly admirers, the chances are that you get them ; and then you may find it difficult to disentangle your feet from the net which you have helped to spread for yourself. Like Lucy, you may (almost before you are aware) take a fancy for some one whom you cannot really respect, and be led away by false hopes, which will never be realised, and which you will some day bitterly repent having ever trusted to."

"Well, I must think how I can change by degrees," said Clara ; "I must not become a dowdy all at once, or indeed at all ; for father and mother wouldn't like that."

"No, nor do I wish it, dear Clara ; keep to the good rule we were speaking of just now, 'neat and tidy, and such as your Heavenly Father would like to see in His child,' and you will not fail to please your parents also, and be *much happier* and safer yourself."

"Well, ma'am, I really believe you are right ;

and I've had an uncomfortable sort of feeling in my mind ever since I have taken to dressing smarter. If it was likely to give me the chance of such a silly goose as Tom Winks, I'm sure I should be sick of it altogether. I must confess this affair of poor Lucy has upset me very much ; for she seems, as it were, thrown away upon such a man. I do think she was made for better things."

"No doubt, we are all intended for better things, and we should live for those, making the law of God the standard of our actions : then our affections will be set on proper objects, and be blessed to us. You see by your own feeling in this matter, and Lucy's vain wishes of his being better, that the Holy Monitor within speaks to us plainly enough as to what is good and seemly, if we will but hearken. I believe you are convinced of this : act up to your new resolutions, and a blessing will rest upon you."

Clara clasped Miss Bentinck's hand, and a glow of real happiness thrilled through her heart to feel that she had, in some degree, regained the esteem of so good and faithful a friend, whom, in the days of her vanity, she had well nigh lost. Louisa, who was two or three years younger, had listened attentively to all that passed, and felt it to be true ; but she could not make up her mind to take so decided a step as Clara seemed disposed to do. She sat wondering how her friend would look without her favourite blue bows and fringes, but comforted herself by thinking that as Clara had said 'it would not do for her to become a dowdy all at once, or indeed

at all,' she would at least wear out the present trimming as it was, and not make any violent or very observable change. As to herself, she felt that *any* alteration would be impossible, as long as she remained at Mrs. Green's, without the girls quizzing her, which was a terrible thought; and she almost wished she could be with Clara at the village dress-maker's, for something within told her that *there* she would be safer and more at peace.

Miss Bentinck felt that enough had been said for the present, and looking toward the sun, now beginning to set, she said, "I think, Louisa, your mother will be expecting you, and perhaps waiting tea for you: we had better be moving."

They rose to go, and Miss Bentinck walked with them as far as the corner of the lane which led to Louisa's home, and then wishing them a kind good-bye, said, "You know I shall always be glad to see either or both of you, whenever you like to come."

It may be easily imagined how happy she felt in the hopeful result of this interview. On reaching home, she humbly offered up a thanksgiving to the Great Giver of all Grace, beseeching Him to confirm and strengthen the impression which had been made upon them; and that evening, when the class assembled, she was no longer saddened by their empty places, as before.

CHAPTER III.

GOODREST.

THE beautiful village of Goodrest, where Miss Bentinck lived, was deservedly so named. Far enough retired from the turmoil of the great city to be thoroughly rural, it was situated in a finely wooded country, with more than one open common, invigorating both to health and spirits. Even to the eyes of stray visitors there was something about the place peculiarly attractive; and all who had ever lived there delighted to return at intervals, on some festive occasion or holiday-time, to refresh themselves in its well-loved haunts. It had been called by some "a little Paradise," and by others "Dream-land." But it had a higher claim to the affections of the inhabitants than any outward attractions. The Church which stood in the centre of the scattered parish, between the two commons, and surrounded by venerable oaks and elms, was in every sense the heart of the place. Its tall graceful spire, pointing up to Heaven, crowned the ancient tower with its fine peal of bells, whose cheerful yet solemn tones gave notice of the hours of prayer. Mr. Bernard had not long been instituted to the parish before it was found necessary to enlarge the church, for the increased number of attendants. This led to extensive improvements within and without, made at considerable expense, with a skill and care worthy

of the sacred building. To speak only of the interior, the two old galleries at the west end, in one of which the old fashioned band of violins and bass-viol were wont to accompany the singing of the psalms, had been taken down ; and the high unsightly pews, hiding the indevout, and seeming almost to forbid a communion of worship, were replaced by open seats, uniting rich and poor in one assembly. The chancel was rebuilt, but the ancient oaken screen retained : a new organ had been introduced, and painted windows, representing the history of the Blessed Redeemer : in every respect the church was worthy to be called God's House of prayer. A choir of voices, old and young, trained to lead the general chorus of hymns, and the responses of prayers and psalms, rising up from the whole congregation, replaced those of a parish clerk. Of the whole services it may be said that they were well fitted to raise all hearts in devotion to Heaven.

The church-yard was especially remarkable. The good Pastor rightly judged that a place consecrated to the repose of the dead, who had died in the joyful hope of the resurrection, was sacred, and deserving of his best attention. Why should it present to surviving friends the unseemly aspect of neglect, making their visit melancholy? Rather he would have it adorned with cypresses and other fitting shrubs, and not *less cared-for* than his own garden. And more *than this*, he encouraged his parishioners to mark *the graves* of departed relatives with the blessed *symbol of the faith* in which they had died.

Many and beautiful, therefore, were the crosses which adorned the churchyard, some of marble, others in stone, metal, or wood. How different these from the great heathen-like tombs, caged in with iron rails, or the tall unsightly slabs, so disfiguring to many English burying-grounds ! Strangers could not be otherwise than pleased to see rose-trees and other flowering plants growing over many of these graves, whilst on others bunches or wreaths of flowers were laid by the hand of affection, on particular days—Sundays and other festivals—as also by some on the anniversaries of the birth or death of those who had been loved in life, and whose memories were still cherished.

Nor did these things alone occupy the Rector's attention. His earnest care, and the untiring zeal of his devoted Curate, were constantly exercised in visiting the sick and afflicted ; and greatly were they beloved among the poor. The schools, also, were objects of their persevering attention ; for they well knew the importance of training up the young in religious principles, and the love of virtue. There were, alas ! many disappointments ; and some children turned out less well than had been hoped ; but there were others who repaid, by their steadiness and good conduct, the anxious efforts of their teachers. Here, it is true, as every where else, some bad spirits might be found, ever on the watch to mislead the innocent and unwary ; for, alas ! there will be tares among the wheat, even unto the end. This should not prevent our earnest efforts to check the growth of evil,

but rather inspire a resolute courage to oppose it vigorously.

In Goodrest there were some special times, besides the great Festivals of the Church, to which the inhabitants looked forward with pleasure. One of these was the school-feast for the children, to which the parents also, and many of the neighbouring clergy and gentry were invited; and a pleasing sight it was to see all ranks uniting to promote the enjoyment of these younger members of the flock, watching their sports in the Rectory field, and helping in the joyous feast prepared for them. Every now and then the choir struck up a merry glee or chorus, for a change in the entertainments, and attracted many listeners. As the shades of evening drew on, the old chestnut trees on the lawn were lighted up with coloured lamps; and then a fire balloon let off. Later still, a grand display of fireworks took place, to the great delight of old as well as young. After this brilliant ending to the day, and ere the party dispersed, they assembled once more beneath the lamp-lit chestnuts, to sing aloud and heartily the National Anthem, ending with three cheers for their kind entertainers.

The other great occasion of festive joy was for the older parishioners, being the anniversary of the Re-opening of the Church after the great improvements, and its Re-consecration by the *Bishop of the diocese*. The day began with *the services of the Church, and Holy Communion*. At the eleven o'clock service a still *larger number was assembled*; then the Church

was thronged with parishioners and friends from a distance, with many clergy, of whom some had formerly been curates at Goodrest, and delighted to join with them again in prayer and praise.

The service itself on this day was greatly enlivened, and the strength of the choir much increased, by the additional voices and hearty response of so many earnest worshippers, both lay and clerical ; and the successful exertions of the organist were duly appreciated. The celebration of Holy Communion, that crowning act of worship, still further united in the bonds of fellowship the hearts of the congregation, and prepared them to pass the remainder of the day together in a spirit of Christian joy.

After a short interval they all met again at an entertainment of simple fare, provided by the gentry of the parish. Rich and poor sat down together without distinction, and a spirit of cheerful kindness pervaded the whole scene. The one great object for which they were assembled, to commemorate the blessing of having such a Church, was present to the minds of all ; nor less universal was the feeling of affection and respect, increasing and deepening more and more, for their good Rector, who had done so much for them. On these occasions, Goodrest was a bright and happy place ; nor was it less, though more quietly so, in its ordinary peaceful routine. The daily morning bell invited such as were able and willing to begin the day with prayer and praise, and then go forth cheered and strengthened to their various duties. There was

evening service, too, on Wednesday and Friday, for those who could ill spare the busy morning time, but looked forward to this as a refreshment of spirit, and felt,—“it is good for us to be here.”

But in the midst of the most peaceful life, and in the most retired scenes, there are some who cannot be satisfied without excitement. Thus in Goodrest, as in most other country places, there was an Annual Fair.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAIR.

HITHERTO little mention has been made of the other members of Miss Bentinck's class: nor indeed is it necessary to introduce them all to our readers, though we may describe those who will be more especially mixed up with the story. Margaret, the eldest of all, was a steady good girl, who had always regularly attended the class, except during a short interval when she was in service, and once when kept at home by a severe rheumatic fever, which crippled her for several months afterwards. She was now sufficiently recovered to assist her mother, who had for some years been a widow, and had always found Margaret a valuable help; for she was diligent, handy, and cheerful, with a pleasant

obliging manner ;—a refreshing contrast to the gloomy looks, and slow unwilling movements of some who make a heavy yoke of that which should be a pleasure,—to share in the labours of their parents. Margaret rose early in the morning to light the fire, and get all in readiness for breakfast ; then, having prepared her little brothers in time for school, devoted herself to the household duties, or any needlework she could get. Latterly she had undertaken a little day-school, the gains of which, though small, were regular. In this she was employed till late in the afternoon : still she came to the class, and was always sorry if other duties obliged her to be absent. Miss Bentinck was glad that she did not think herself too old to come, because in every way she set a good example to the rest.

Ellen, the next eldest, and Harriet, her younger sister, have been already mentioned : they were both good girls, pleasant and cheerful with their companions, and useful to their mother at home, but a little wanting in energy and regularity, and rather too fond of dress.

Then came Susan, who has also been mentioned as giving Miss Bentinck some uneasiness, and had now quite ceased to attend the class.

After her was Rose, often irregular in her attendance, making excuse that, as her mother kept a small shop, she was wanted to attend upon the customers, as well as to look after the younger children ; but notwithstanding this, she might have come much oftener had she been but willing. Fortunately, she lived near to Margaret, who would often call in and persuade her

to finish off the work she had to do, and come to the class ; or would take her the book "to read up," if she had got behind the rest through absence ; indeed, she would help her in any way. Rose was a pleasant good-natured girl, and looked so placid and patient, that it was difficult to be very angry with her. Miss Bentinck had, however, been several times obliged to speak to her in private about her want of neatness in dress, and cleanliness of person,—for some time with little or no effect ; but at length she observed a change for the better, and it was quite a pleasure now to see her join the party more frequently, and always neatly dressed.

Mary was not much younger than Rose ; less tall and strong, but pale and thin, more like a lily than a rose. She was an orphan, and frequently looked depressed ; but her countenance bespoke a gentle disposition, and her dark brown eyes, which had an earnest expression, lighted up with gratitude at the least kind word or encouragement. She was in the service of a kind mistress, who managed to spare her twice a week, that she might attend the class ; for having met with many hindrances, she was backward in her learning. Mary and Rose, with many others, were at this time preparing for their Confirmation which was drawing near.

Of the younger girls, who were not yet old enough for this holy rite of the Church, it will suffice to mention Janet, Sarah, and Ann. They were nearly of an age, but unlike in disposition. *Janet was a clever child, fond of reading, quick at figures, and equally ready to put herself forward,*

—answering questions unasked, and showing up other girls for their mistakes ; but her very quickness led her to make careless faults herself, and her copy-book had many a blot to show.

Sarah, though less clever, was a much pleasanter child to teach ; careful, methodical, diligent, she generally came well prepared with her lessons, always clean and tidy, quiet and respectful in her manner, and never spoke an unkind word of her companions. Her mother, who was a respectable woman, and had bestowed great care in training her up, had good reason to rejoice in her. The chief fault of her character was vanity ; for she was a pretty child, and full well she knew it.

Little Ann was the youngest of the set, as plain a child as the other was pretty ; but being good-natured and full of fun, was a general favourite. Though rather careless, and sometimes disposed to be idle,—yet, really wishing to do right, she was easily recalled to her sense of duty.

Considering these differences of character, and the weak points in so many of her pupils, it was natural that Miss Bentinck should look forward with some anxiety to the effect which the approaching fair might have upon some of them. She saw the booths rising up one after another, and filling fast with gilded toys and gingerbread, and tempting articles of every description. So far, indeed, it was rather a pretty scene, such as might give a day's pleasure to the younger ones, and help them to spend their pennies, long treasured up for the occasion, and

now "burning in their pockets," on some coveted toy for themselves, or little presents to each other. But she was thinking of her own girls, and hoped they would not join in any of the boisterous amusements that were likely to be prepared. As she had not disguised her feeling about the whole matter of the fair, they could plainly see that she would be best pleased if they kept aloof altogether. But as many of the parents also looked forward to it as a pleasant holiday, she had not urged her objections, lest she might seem to condemn too strongly to the children what their elders equally enjoyed. Moreover, she felt that, under their charge, they could come to no harm, but return home before the noise and riot began.

Some few, alas ! had careless parents, who would not mind their going alone. Susan's was just such a case ; and even if her elder sister went with her, she would be no protection ; rather, indeed, the reverse ; for she also would do anything for what she called "a bit of fun." Miss Bentinck having met several not many days before, kindly warned them all to be on their guard, lest they should be led unawares into some mischief. Of Margaret, and some of the elder ones, she felt secure ; and was more at ease about Clara and Louisa, since the late conversation. She hoped they had too much good taste (to say the least) to join with the rude and noisy ; but she feared for some of the younger, and also for Susan, and others like *her*, old enough indeed to be wiser, but self-confident, and determined to have their own

way, therefore too likely to be led into temptation and trouble.

The day wore on; most of the villagers contrived to make at the least a half-holiday; mothers, having done their morning's work, and prepared their husbands' dinner, hastened to "tidy" themselves and their eager little ones; and giving to each for fairings such half-pence as could be spared, set off in happy groups for the great centre of attraction. It was a gay scene as they crossed the common from various quarters; and soon the long line of booths was filled with delighted children, gazing from side to side at the various toys and pretty things. One set his heart upon a sword, a whip, or a penny trumpet; another would lavish all his or her little fortune on a gingerbread king or queen; whilst some would have marbles, or a top. The mothers mostly contented themselves with buying rattles for the babies, or "lollypops," to reward the good children at home, or to soothe a squalling one; or they would buy a pair of braces or "neckerchief for father," if he was unable to come himself. Many of the gentry also were present, pleased to see their poorer neighbours happy; and came forward now and then to assist in some small purchase, when a poor customer was looking with longing eyes at some "rare bargain," but rather too much for the purse.

Thus, by five or six o'clock a good clearance had been made of the toys and gingerbread. Hitherto, all had been quiet enjoyment within the booths. Nor had the throngs without been

idle. The "merry-go-rounds" had been constantly moving with a succession of riders on wooden horses or in cars. The men and elder boys, having returned from their work, hastened to the scene of action to join the various games till the climbing pole was ready. Others, both girls and boys, were eagerly choosing the best donkeys for a race. Some poor hacks, dignified by the name of ponies, but hardly superior, either in pace or condition, to their more humble companions, were in great request among those who could afford an extra twopence for a ride. All was bustle and motion on the Green. Had Miss Bentinck been there, she would have seen among the racers, Janet, Sarah, and little Ann; indeed, none of the young ones could be satisfied without a ride. But one special group there was, who had taken their station at the starting post, ready for the next turn. Susan, and her elder sister Nelly, were determined not to miss their ride, and had persuaded Hester and Amelia, two equally giddy friends of their's, to join them. There was a chuckle of ill-repressed laughter among the boys, to see "such big 'uns" coming forward; and, as they watched their awkwardness in mounting, the amusement heightened; they were by no means so light and easy to mount as the younger set, and the man to whom the donkeys belonged, as he swung them one after another into the saddles, accompanied *the action by sundry winks to the by-standers, and by a groan of pretended exhaustion after each.* *This was quite irresistible to the boys, whose laughter now pealed forth into an uproarious*

shout, which made the girls anxious to start and get beyond their reach. But the donkey-man, thinking to make the most of his opportunity, cried out "Stop a minute, Madermoisells, every Jenny has her Jockey: now boys! who'll match the ladies in a race?"

"Oh I!" and "I," "and I," resounded on all sides.

"Four to match four!" cried the man; and the competition was so great, that the price was raised, and fourpence given for the sorriest beast, instead of twopence the ride. The stoutest lads pushed their way to the stand, and as soon as they could "fumble out" their pence, jumped up, and the race began, "full-tilt." Great was the excitement; all were prepared; the start was made; the boys, reckless of mischief, took delight in frightening the girls, driving their steeds close beside them, and whipping the donkeys to make them kick: so that it became more of a "skirmish" than a race. Susan, being mounted on the best, came in first to the winning post, Amelia next, at least so she declared; but the "biggest" of the boys, who had come in nearly even, sharply contended the point with her. Happily, two or three persons had been appointed to decide, for the girls got as angry as the boys; but the case being at last adjudged in their favour, they received the pink bows which had been set up as prizes for the lady-winners, and pinned them jauntily in their hats. *The disappointed lads followed them, shouting and hissing, and some of the others, stirred up to mischief, cried out, "Look at 'em, how the*

strut along, with their fine flounces ! you might almost think that they were court-ladies, to see 'em walk !" "and them other two," pointing at Hester and Nelly, "how grandly they stick out ! I s'pose they've got hoops !"

"What's they made of?" cried another; "I guess it's cane." "Aye, aye, and I'll have a touch at it;" then quickly pulling out his pocket-knife, he added, "it's just what I want, is a good cane."

"And that you shall have if you'll come along with me," said a gruff voice; and, at the same moment, the boy felt a hard grip at his collar, and looking up, saw himself in the hands of the policeman, who was always on duty for these occasions. Down went the corners of his mouth, and sundry fears darted through his mind as to whether the watch-box would be the next step. However, the offence was not quite serious enough for that; so, with a good shake, to make him remember, the man let him go, saying, "Now, mind I don't catch you after any more mischief."

Meanwhile, the girls had made their escape, and disappeared among the crowd. Much pushing and jostling was going on in all directions, and especially in the neighbourhood of the "merry-go-rounds." This was a point of much attraction to the younger set; Janet and little Ann among others were whirling about to *their hearts' content*. Janet especially, who had *won a pink bow* in the donkey race, was in the *highest spirits*, as it attracted many admiring *remarks from the by-standers*. Sarah had also

enjoyed a round or two; but she soon turned giddy, and begging to get out, went back to her mother, who had made a point of coming with her, and was standing near watching their sport. She had also kindly taken Janet and Ann under her care: for neither of their mothers could come. It was well for them she had done so; for the "merry-go-plot" as the fair people called it, soon became the scene of much confusion. A set of big boys came running up to "the whirls," to see what fun they could find there; and, crying out that the "little 'uns had had more than their share already, and must turn out," rudely tried to seize one of the cars; but he was rewarded with a good box on the ear from the owner, and retreated, to escape a second. Having let go his hold of the regulator, the whole machine came to a sudden stop, several of the riders were jostled together, Janet was thrown forward against the opposite edge of the car, receiving a hard bump on her head; little Ann tumbled out on the grass. She was not at all hurt, and, jumping up in a moment, ran to help poor Janet out of the whirly. She alighted in a very doleful plight, pressing her hand to her forehead, which already showed a great blue bump, and no doubt hurt her a good deal. Sarah's mother came to meet her, and taking her kindly by the hand, said, "Come, child, we'll go into one of the tents and get a drop of cold water to bathe it," which they accordingly did. A draught of water revived her considerably; and the two other children, who were as thirsty as little fishes after suc

exciting play, partook. Once more they proceeded to look at some of the pretty things in the booths, and take a peep into the show-vans ; but poor Janet's head ached so much, that she could no longer enjoy anything, and as the others looked tired also, the mother wisely took them home.

By this time, indeed, the fair was pretty well cleared of all the younger ones ; and they were succeeded by the elder set, who had mostly been unable to leave their work till late in the afternoon. Of this number was Clara, who now came with her father and mother ; and almost at the same instant, entering the other end of the line of booths, appeared Tom Winks, with Lucy on one arm and Louisa on the other. Louisa looked proud of this distinction, having never been escorted by such a beau before, and inwardly rejoiced that her sister had picked up such a smart "intended." Her satisfaction was, however, a little abated by his turning round to her, and saying, "Come Lou, now we've reached our point, you may ease off a little ; you're a pretty heavy drag, as a second : and I see your friend Clara just appearing ; so you can go and walk with her, and leave Lucy and me to ourselves." Louisa, of course, could say nothing against this proposal, and prepared to move off ; but anxious to make sure that she was not to be cast off altogether, said as she was going, "Well, you'll come and join us by-and-bye, won't you ?" "O yes, to be sure," answered Tom with a knowing wink : "I've got to ask Clara to be one of the bridesmaids."

Thus satisfied, she went to meet Clara. By this time Ellen and Harriet had also arrived ; their mother could not come, being unwell, and had therefore bid them watch at the window of her cottage till Clara and her parents came in sight. As soon, therefore, as they made their appearance, the eager girls hastened to join them, and they all proceeded to the fair together. Louisa was now well provided with friends, till her own companions should rejoin her ; and they walked about from one booth to another, examining the various articles, and making some purchases for those at home, or distant relations ; but for themselves there was nothing very attractive. To look at Harriet's smart hat, trimmed with white ribbon, and flowers inside and out, you might well suppose that such gear as was put up for sale at the fair was beneath her notice. So also with Ellen, whose *bonnet* was quite as smart as Harriet's *hat*.

Clara and Louisa were dressed much as usual ; they had not forgotten what had passed in the conversation under the old oak-tree ; and although, as they then said, they could not make any very sudden change at present, *they*, at all events, had not been buying any new things for this occasion, as Ellen and Harriet evidently had done. They strolled quietly on ; and though not finding much to tempt them in the way of purchases, were amused with all they saw. They next took a turn round the "merry-go-plot:" but it was getting too noisy there to be pleasant ; so they came back to see the "rare shows." There were vans with grand painted

boards, detailing wonderful things to be seen within.

First, there was a tall Scotchman, almost a giant, who performed prodigious feats of several kinds, such as standing on his head, and blowing a trumpet the while, and in that position supporting on his feet a little dwarf, his companion, who climbed up his perpendicular legs with wonderful agility, and stood triumphantly aloft, planting his tiny feet on the broad soles of his gigantic master ; and after capering about for some minutes, came down again as nimbly as he had mounted ; then, with a sudden spring, turning "head over heels" in the air ; just as the giant released himself from his uncomfortable position and regained his feet, the little imp flew into his arms, and crept grinning into his large waistcoat pocket.

Various other antics he performed at the bidding of the giant. Then there was a change in the performances by an exhibition of dancing dogs, and a learned pig, who was admirably trained to point with his snout to any letters of the alphabet which he was bid to find, and in many other ways showed his sagacity.

The second van contained a varied collection of birds, parrots, and mackaws, who entertained the company by a deafening chatter and screaming, canaries without end, and other pets for sale. In the midst was a large cage, containing "*a happy family*," as it was called, consisting of cats, rats and mice, an owl, a rabbit, and a monkey, with other creatures most opposed to, and destructive of, each other by nature, but al

trained to live in harmony together. Whether they really were "a happy family" cooped up in their cage, or what might have happened had their daily food been forgotten or delayed, are questions which we leave to the decision of the learned, or of those who keep guard over them.

The third exhibition was still more interesting to the children, as it contained a number of monkeys, of every size, from the great baboon, so unflattering a likeness of his fellow-creature, man, down to the small West Indian marmozette, which you could put into a tea-cup. Various and amusing were their frolics, and many a gingerbread nut did they coax out of their visitors by their chatterings and grimaces, and their eager outstretched hands.

The young people had now seen enough of the sights, and were not sorry to exchange the close air of the vans for the fresh breeze without. By this time also their friend Lucy and Tom Winks had finished their tour of the fair, and were coming to meet them. Clara had seen him several times; but he had never till now met her parents: he therefore, before they drew near, begged Lucy to introduce him, that he might (to use his own language) "do the civil," by asking Clara to the wedding. "We can't have the old people, you know," added he, eyeing them a little askance, as they approached; "for we've so many friends of our own: the little parlour won't hold more."

"Well," answered Lucy, "we must think a little about that; perhaps Clara's mother mayn't

like her to come alone. I think the little parlor would take in one more."

"Well, then," said Tom, with a sigh of mock resignation, "I suppose we must e'en put u with the old lady; but the father'll be too busy I hope. I don't much like the look of him, he seems such a starch old fellow."

"He's a real good one, though, I assure you," replied Lucy, a little hurt at the remarks on her old friends.

"Ah, well," answered Tom, carelessly, "I dare say he's a very fine character; but I'm not over fond of those '*rare* good ones,' they look so prim and self-satisfied; there's often a deal of humbug in 'em."

"Well, well," said Lucy, lowering her voice "here they come; so pray be on your good behaviour."

Tom gave another twitch of the mouth, and a sly wink at Lucy, then repressing his saucy sneer, and smoothing down his cheeks with his finger and his thumb, managed to compose his face before they came up.

Lucy felt a little shy at having to introduce him; for Mr. and Mrs. Watson being both good folks of the old school, she was rather doubtful if he would be much to their taste. But there was no help for it; so, putting a good face upon the matter, she went up to them, and after shaking hands, said, "Mrs. Watson, I don't think you have met Mr. Winks before." Tom made his best bow; and then turning to Clara, said "We hope you mean to honour us by standing bridesmaid to Lucy; and perhaps," added he

stammering a little, "either Mr. or Mrs. Watson will be of the party, and bring you." Some conversation followed, during which old Watson started various subjects, as if to see what sort of young man this new acquaintance was; for though not favourably impressed by what he had heard, he was willing to be civil for Lucy's sake, both because she was a friend of Clara's, and also he entertained a sincere regard for Lucy's parents. It was not easy, however, for either party to find much in common: for they were as different from each other as two men could well be. Tom Winks, to whom any thing like sensible talk was a burden, evidently seemed ill at ease under old Watson's searching eye; and he was anxious to make his escape.

Just at this moment he espied two old acquaintances at a little distance, and was turning in his mind how he could manage to join them, when he was relieved of his difficulty by their coming up and accosting him.

"Hallo! old fellow; there you are at last! we've been hunting the place all round to find you." "Well, I didn't expect to see you here," answered Tom. "I should have thought with all the sights of the great city, you wouldn't have cared for a country fair like this."

"Oh! but I think a fair is a very jolly thing; and as for the 'great city,' one's glad enough to get a run away now and then for a little fresh air."

"I suppose it's no use asking you to join the games, as you seem so well occupied with the ladies," said the younger of his friends, in a sort

of loud whisper, intended as an ask-leave of absence for Tom. No one offered him (as he expected) a word of encouragement to go with them ; for none much liked the looks of the strangers ; and Lucy inwardly hoped that he would remember his engagement to see them safe home. Old Watson looked on, neither helping, nor hindering Tom's decision : his quiet grey eye turned sometimes upon him, sometimes upon his friends, little satisfied with the looks or manner of either party. At last, Tom said in rather an undecided tone, "I don't think I *can* very well come with you this evening ; I have these two young ladies under my charge."

"Well ! I'm sorry for it," said the elder one, who had spoken first ; "it's rather hard when we've come all the way from town to have a little sport with you."

"As to that," answered Tom, "I don't see that there's much sport to be found here."

"Oh ! there's always enough at hand, if you choose to make it, and have a pleasant friend or two."

It was very plain that Tom was much wishing to go with them, though he would not say so ; and Lucy, unwilling that he should lose his pleasure for her sake, gently said, "Well then, never mind us ; if you like to go for a little while, I dare say we can amuse ourselves till you join us again : but you *won't* be late, *will you?*" added she earnestly, "or they'll be *anxious* about us at home."

"No, my pretty one ! good girl ! always *thinking of others* rather than herself ! No, no ;

I won't be late; but where shall I find you again?"

"Lucy, you had better come home and drink tea with us," said Mrs. Watson; "you look tired, and will be all the better for a little rest before you set off home again."

"Thank you," answered Lucy; "I shall be very glad to do so, if you please."

"And Louisa too, of course," added Mrs. Watson.

"Well, then, Tom, you had better come for us to Mr. Watson's; and you'll mind and not be late;" and as Lucy spoke these words she gave him an affectionate look.

"No, no," answered he, laughing, "why! you don't think I *could* forget *you*?"

This seemed a sufficient assurance; and his friends were getting impatient; so Tom gaily waived his hand, and set off. Watson's eye followed them for a minute as they disappeared among the crowd, one on each side of Tom; and he gravely shook his head and sighed, fearing no good would come of such companions. Lucy, too, looked anxiously after them; but it was no use to stand watching, and they had all had enough of the fair; therefore Mrs. Watson took her husband's arm, and they turned towards home. There seemed to be a weight on the spirits of all the little party, which the younger ones could hardly account for to themselves, except by the grave looks of their elders; and they all walked on in silence. When they were on the point of leaving the fair, a thought suddenly struck Clara, and coming close up to Mrs

Watson, she said, "Mother ! do ask Ellen and Harriet to come back with us to tea ; it would make us such a cheerful party, and I'm sure they'd so like to come." Mrs. Watson, who was a kind-hearted body, and willing to give the young folks pleasure, readily consented. Ellen and Harriet were much pleased, and ran off quickly to tell their mother, rejoining the party before they could turn the corner of the lane. They soon reached Watson's little farm-house, which was a perfect pattern of neatness and comfort. The plates and dishes, ranged in due order along the shelves, tin covers as bright as looking glass, each hanging on its proper peg, and the well-polished brass candlesticks, with pieces of china, and other little ornaments on the mantel-piece, all bespoke the care of a good house-wife, and we may add of her diligent, helpful daughter, which Mrs. Watson had always found in Clara. The tea table was soon prepared, old and young all helping, and making merry over their hastily got-up party. Mrs. Watson added from her store-cupboard a good plum cake and honey, which, with the addition of fresh eggs, and gingerbread from the fair, now produced for trial, made quite a gala feast, and by the help of the China-man's

"Cups which cheer, but not inebriate,"

the spirits of the little party soon revived.

Some there were, however, whose thoughts were more grave than usual. Lucy could not shake off an indefinite anxiety about Tom, and in this old Watson shared. He had strange mis-

givings in his mind ; for he had more experience of life, and he had overheard one of the young fellows, just as they were going away, whisper something to Tom about having a good game at skittles, which he knew full well could only be at the public house. Mrs. Watson's thoughts travelled in the same direction, for she could clearly perceive what her husband felt. While some were thus musing, more lively conversation prevailed at the further end of the table, where Clara was helping her young friends to the little feast provided for them. They were talking over the events of the day, and making comparisons between the different sights, which drew forth some amusing points of character and varieties of taste. After a while, their thoughts naturally turned to the closing scene of their fair-day.

"Clara, what do you think of those young friends of Tom Winks'?" asked Louisa in an under tone of voice, so as not to be heard by Lucy.

"I can't say I much like the looks of them," answered Clara in a whisper.

"Nor did I; and yet I can't quite tell what made me feel so."

"Well then," interposed Harriet, "isn't it rather hard to judge them so hastily? the youngest at least seemed a decent lad, and had a very pleasant voice."

"Ah!" said Louisa, laughing, "I can guess why you think so; I heard him say, 'What a *tasty hat* that girl has got! she's fit to be a *May-queen*.'"

"Well!" said Ellen, "I'm glad he didn't say

that of me ; I should not have considered it any compliment. That comes of wearing such fanciful hats ; I've often told you, Harriet, that they're only fit for children ; he couldn't have said that of my *bonnet*."

"It's quite as smart as mine, though, if there's any harm in that," answered Harriet. "Not that I see any, nor any reason why one should not be a May-queen. I should like it well enough."

"Then I'd keep the hat for May-day," said Clara, smiling ; "and certainly I would not go to church in it any more, if I were you," added she more gravely. "Perhaps you are not aware that it has drawn from many folks some hard remarks upon you ; and, to speak it in all kindness, it really does not befit such a holy and solemn place ; there, at any rate, you can't wish to be like a May-queen."

"Well, perhaps it would be better not ; but *your* bonnet is smart enough, Clara, even in church."

Clara felt the colour mounting to her cheek ; she thought it unseemly in one so much younger to be thus free in her remarks, but she remembered the conversation under the old oak-tree, and how lately she herself had felt pretty much as Harriet still did. She also recollected how that it was owing to Miss Bentinck's reasoning with her, which had brought her to view the *matter in a better light*. She therefore repressed her feelings of impatience, and answered quietly, "Not quite so smart as yours, at all events, dear Harriet ; but I freely allow that I,

myself, now think it a little over-fine, and do not mean to spend so much on my dress in future."

Ellen and Harriet both looked surprised, and the former said, "Why, what ever can have come to you, Clara, to make you think so differently? You talk almost like Miss Bentinck."

"Oh! but you know she has given up Miss Bentinck," said Harriet; "she's *too old* to be taught any more."

"No, indeed!" said Clara, "I've not given her up, nor has she given me up; she's too kind a friend to give up any one willingly, though for several reasons I cannot attend the class any longer."

"Oh, then, it's not all because you're so *very* old?"

"Come, come, don't be malicious," said Clara, good-naturedly. "I confess I had a little bit of foolish pride about that; it first came over me one day when Susan and Nelly laughed at me about it, and said they wouldn't keep to the class like that;—so tall as I am, to be set down for an ignoramus. But I've felt ashamed of it ever since I told Miss Bentinck that I didn't mean to come any more. She spoke so gently about it, and showed me so clearly that I was wrong, without seeming angry, as *I* should have been in her place. I have many times since thought I should like to ask for admission again, but I'm half ashamed to do that; it would seem so silly."

"Oh, no!" said Harriet, "I'm sure she would *not* think so. I know she'd be pleased, and it would be so nice to have you back *amor*

us, and we've got such a nice new book ; *do come*, there's a good girl."

"Well," said Clara, "I should like it well enough ; but, as I said before, there *are* other reasons why I really cannot at present. Mother wants me at home a good deal just now, whenever I can be spared from the dress-making. I wish that engagement was at an end ; it seems to go against me somehow more than it used to do ; but I must keep on another quarter, and then we shall see what can be done."

"Well, well," said Harriet, "we won't tease you any more ; you're a dear, good girl, not to be cross with me for saying all I have ; but I often longed to laugh at you a bit for having grown so old all of a sudden ; however, now it's all right, if you mean to be one of us still."

While they thus chatted, the evening was slipping away. They were still sitting round the tea-table, enjoying the pleasant twilight, so favourable to cozy talk ; but now it was getting really dark, and Watson felt it was time for the girls to be going home : yet Tom had not arrived. He rose uneasily, and reaching down his hat from its peg, went towards the gate to see if he was on the road, leaning over it for a minute or two, in the hope that he would still make his appearance. But as no one was to be seen, he determined to go in search of him. When he reached the Green, all was noise and confusion ; he felt sure where Tom and his friends would be found. Therefore, passing by *the booths*, he went straight to the public house. There the skittle-players, as well as the

lookers-on, had all been drinking freely, and had grown more and more excited, ready enough to pick a quarrel with any one who displeased them. A gipsy man, who was standing among the spectators, had rudely accused Tom of playing unfairly, which he and his friends retorted upon him, and from angry words they soon came to blows. The gipsy was a strong sinewy man, and Tom in no condition to stand against him. The battle was short; for after giving a few ineffectual blows, Tom received one which fairly brought him to the ground, and left him with a "black eye and a bloody nose." Watson came to the entrance of the yard just in time for the end of the fray, and to see Tom helped to his feet by his friends. The policeman, hearing a disturbance, appeared on the scene, and ordered off both the combatants. Having seen Tom in the earlier part of the day in respectable society and smartly dressed, he told him "he should be ashamed of himself, to be found at night in such a condition." By this time his friends had brought some cold water to stop the bleeding; and Watson waited till Tom could recognise him. He had just wits left enough to do this; for the old farmer's tall robust figure was not one to be easily forgotten; and to say the truth, the remembrance of him had haunted Tom several times during the day; and now, with the sight of him, came the thought of Lucy. Watson led him out from the noisy crowd.

"Where are they?" asked he, anxiously; "Lucy and her sister, I mean," lowering his voice, *as if almost ashamed of naming them.*

"Safe at my house," returned Watson; "far safer than with you, I reckon."

"What shall I do?" said Tom, in a deplorable voice; "I can't appear before them."

"No, indeed," rejoined the farmer; "you may well be ashamed to do that; you'd better be off home, and get to bed; I'll see them safe back again."

So saying, he would have gone home; but seeing that Tom was looking piteously round for some friendly hand, he stepped up to his two (so-called) friends, who were now standing at the entrance of a dancing booth. "Come, you young gents," said he, in a stern voice, "I'd have you look after your friend; for if you don't see him save home, I think he'll never get there."

"I can't help that," mumbled out the elder one. "It's his own fault; why should he go and make such an ass of himself? I must go back to town; he may get home as best he can."

"Aye, aye," answered Watson, "that's what you call being a friend! lead him into all the mischief you can, and leave him in the lurch, when you've brought him to such a state that he can't take care of himself!"

"I'll go with him," said the younger, who was not so hardened in selfishness. "Poor fellow! he really can't go alone."

"That's right," said Watson, more kindly; "and, my lad, if you'll take a word of advice from an old man, who has seen something of *life*, let this evening's 'sport,' as you call it, be a lesson to you. Perhaps you meant no harm

in going into bad company, but you see what it comes to. You'll never get any good from such a friend as that," pointing to the other, who had turned away, and coolly entered the dancing booth.

"Well, sir, I believe you're right," answered the young man. "I'll think about it."

"Aye, do," said Watson, "and perhaps you'll live to thank me for my advice; but now look to your friend, and take him safely home."

Tom scarcely understood what was passing; he only knew that he was very miserable, and feeling much bruised as well as tired, had sunk upon the bench, and was leaning his head against the wall.

"Come, my boy," said the young man, going up to him kindly, and shaking him gently by the shoulder; "get up, and let's go home."

"Is that you, Ned?" said poor Tom. "Are you coming home with me? Well, you're a good fellow; I'm very ready to go off with you."

So saying, he got up, and they were setting off together, when a respectable person, who knew Tom's family, clearly perceiving that he was not in a fit state to walk two miles and more, offered to take him home in his taxed cart. After they had driven off, Ned stood pondering in his own mind what he should do. Watson's few words had made an impression upon him. He was himself a well disposed youth, and had often thought that his elder companion was a worthless person; therefore, instead of joining him in the booth, he went away by himself, resolving to have nothing more to do with him.

Meanwhile, Watson regained his house. Every one plainly perceived from his looks that something was much amiss. He told them the whole truth, plainly, though briefly; for he felt that Lucy ought to know all that had happened, and he warned her not to risk her happiness with such a man. She was, of course, greatly shocked, and so were all the party. They looked at each other in mute amazement, never having expected that Tom Winks' staying away would have caused so much mischief. Poor Lucy looked pale as ashes, and grief seemed to have entered into her very soul. It was too deep for words or tears; her heart seemed to die within her at the sad news; for she loved him dearly. Old Watson thought the kindest thing would be to take her straight home. "Come, my dears," said he, "put on your things; it's getting very late, and they will be feeling uneasy about you at home." They were soon ready, and on their way. The good farmer kindly drew Lucy's arm within his, leaving the younger ones to follow. If he had been her own father, he could not have talked more kindly or judiciously to her. Lucy felt very grateful to him; but it seemed as if all the joy of her life had vanished in an instant. When she could bring herself to answer his remarks, she said as much.

"No, no, my dear, you must not allow yourself to speak so, or to think it. I do not wonder *at your* being bewildered and distressed just *now*; but ere long, when you can think it all *over quietly*, you will come to see that such a *man is not worth* pining for. I do not judge

Tom Winks from this one offence. Others, who know him better than you do, have no respect for him; and I have reason to believe that those friends of his are not the only bad company he keeps. You may be thankful to have made the discovery in time: I call it a merciful escape."

Honest Watson had taken it for granted that all future acquaintance would be at an end between them; and, indeed, so did Lucy, for she felt the truth of all he said. She also knew what her father would say, and that he would never suffer Tom to cross his threshold again. They walked on for a while in silence, when Watson resumed the conversation. "You might imagine, my dear, that in time you could reclaim him from his evil habits, and wean him from his low companions. But if the care and love of his parents, who are themselves so respectable, and all the home influences have failed to mould his young mind to virtue, what could *you* hope to do when he is confirmed in vice? Brought up, as you have been, in religious principles, you would be rendered miserable by his neglect of all that is holy, or it might be that your own steadfastness would be shaken, and you would no longer be the Lucy so dear to her family."

By this time they had reached the home of Ellen and Harriet; the others wishing them good night at the door, proceeded on their way. Watson gave his other arm to Louisa, and the addition of a third put an end to the conversation. *But they were now very near their own home, and a few minutes more brought them to*

the door. It was opened by Farmer Burton himself, who cordially thanked Watson for bringing the girls home, though surprised to see *him* instead of Tom. He now observed Lucy's pale face, and turning anxiously to Watson, said, "Is anything the matter?"

"Let them go straight to bed," answered the kind old man; "and I'll sit down with you for a few minutes."

"Well, girls, you look tired, and had better go to bed: so good night."

This was a great relief to poor Lucy, who had above all dreaded to hear the sad adventure told over again. They left the two farmers to talk it over by themselves, while the mother's ready ear and loving heart received in private the full outpouring of her daughter's sorrow. Mrs. Burton was a wise and good mother, and knew how to deal with her child for the best; and, after allowing her to relieve her full heart, she advised her to pray to God for guidance and comfort, kissed her tenderly, and left her.

CHAPTER V.

OPPORTUNITIES.

ON the next class-day after the fair, several of the scholars were absent; and whilst the others were assembling, Miss Bentinck learned the reason from those who had arrived.

"*Well,*" said she, "it is only what I ex-

pected. Gingerbread and 'lollypops,' sweets and 'merry-goes' are apt to give head-aches and various other such discomforts. However, it comes but once a year. Now tell me how you enjoyed it."

"Oh! very much indeed, ma'am," exclaimed several; "it was such fun whirling about, and to see the men and boys climbing the pole, and the hopping match." "And then the donkey-race," said one or two others; "that was the best of all."

"Well, I didn't like so much jolting," said Sarah; "I know I wished often enough to stop and get off; it quite took away my breath."

"I didn't mind that half so much as the 'whirly,'" said Janet, whose forehead still showed the large purple bruise.

"Poor child! I do not wonder at your having a little spite against that for using you so ill," said Miss Bentinck, smiling; "but you know it is the chance of war;

'They who will to battle go,
Must stand prepared for many a blow.'

"But I did not think I was going to the wars," exclaimed Janet.

"You see we are sometimes caught when we least expect it. And how did my little Ann like it? I heard that some one was rolled out upon the grass like a ball."

"Oh! I didn't mind the tumble," said the merry child; "but they went round so fast, it made me giddy; and I really was not sorry to be tilted out, for I only came down on the grass."

But I liked the monkeys best of all," added she, laughing, as the thought of their funny tricks returned to her mind.

"I should think they would suit you exactly. I guess you gave them best part of your gingerbread, and so escaped being the worse for eating it yourself, as some of the others are."

"That is a good guess," said Sarah; "for she gave it all away to them."

"That *was* generous; but I hope she had a taste, and that some one gave *my* little monkey a bit?"

"Oh, ma'am," said little Ann, drawing close to her and looking up in her face, "I'm not quite a monkey. I did have some gingerbread, though; for Sarah and Janet both gave me a share of theirs."

"Please, ma'am," said Rose, encouraged by the turn the conversation had taken, "wouldn't you like just to taste it? It's so very good; and I have kept this little parcel done up for you quite clean and nice; will you like to accept it?" added she, placing it shyly on the table before Miss Bentinck.

"Thank you, dear; it was very kind of you to remember me. I should very much like a little bit, and I have two little nieces staying with me just now, who will be quite pleased to have some."

At this moment Margaret, who had been unexpectedly detained, came in with Ellen and Harriet.

"Well, Margaret, though late, you have not *lost much* of the lesson; you see we have not *yet begun*: we have been talking over the fair;

such a grand occasion has made us quite irregular. But I think we must begin at once now, or it will be dark before we have done."

The books were soon produced, and they ranged themselves quietly round the table, and proceeded as usual. When the class broke up, and most of them had left the room, Miss Bentinck observed that Ellen and Harriet lingered behind, as if they wished to speak to her. Margaret also remained; but they all seemed shy of beginning what they had to say. Miss Bentinck had noticed that Ellen and Harriet looked unusually grave; and now seeing their perplexity, she broke the silence, to set them more at their ease.

"Well, Ellen, how did *you* like the fair? and you, Harriet?"

"Oh, ma'am! not much," answered they; "the beginning was pleasant enough; but the end was very unhappy."

"Why, what has happened?" asked Miss Bentinck, seeing the girls almost ready to cry.

"Oh, ma'am! poor Lucy! it is so very sad."

"Pray tell me; what *has* happened to Lucy?"

By degrees the whole story came out, and Miss Bentinck was now as sad as they. "I am truly grieved to hear it," said she; "but I am not surprised. I have felt uneasy about that engagement ever since I knew of it. How does poor Lucy bear it? have either of you seen her since?"

"No, ma'am;" answered Ellen; "Mother says we had better let her alone to be quiet, and *recover herself*; and she has Louisa at home with

her now ; for Farmer Burton says he will not let his girls go back to the town any more ; but means to keep them at home ; and has written to Mrs. Green to tell her so."

"Clara has seen her once since," said Margaret, "and says she is pretty well considering what has happened ; but she has quite made up her mind to have no more to say to him. She says she can't feel any respect for him after such conduct, and without that they could not be happy together."

"I am very glad to hear it ; she has decided wisely," answered Miss Bentinck ; "she could never have been happy in such a marriage. I hope you will take this as a lesson to you all, and never become intimate with any one of whose principles you are not sure. Only think what misery might have been the consequence, if she had not discovered till too late, that he was addicted to these bad ways. It is a great mercy it has come to light in time, to save poor Lucy from such a fate."

"It is, indeed," answered Margaret ; "but it's very sad, any how. It quite went to my heart, as I caught sight of her at a little distance, just as she came to the door to let in Clara ; she looked so pale and sad."

"No doubt," said Miss Bentinck ; "it is quite natural she should feel very unhappy after such a sudden shock ; but now that she has once determined on the right course, she will soon get over it. She is a good sensible girl ; but more *than that*, her resolution is a proof of her sound *principles*, and in that especially I rejoice."

Ellen and Harriet seemed quite subdued in their manner, and more thoughtful than Miss Bentinck had ever seen them; they still seemed disposed to linger; she therefore took the opportunity of impressing upon them the lesson to be gathered from this event.

"You see what it is, my dear girls, to yield ever so little to folly. Lucy was always a good girl, and would not have done anything which she *knew* to be *positively wrong*, as she has shown by her decision on this occasion: but being a pretty girl, as she certainly is, vanity has been her weak point; she gave way to it insensibly, and the pleasure of being admired, led to her intimacy with a young man less well principled than herself; and you see the fearful risk she has run in consequence."

"I have often wondered," said Margaret, "how Mr. and Mrs. Burton could approve of the acquaintance; they are so strict and particular in all good ways themselves."

"I do not so much wonder," answered Miss Bentinck, "that they should have been taken with old Winks and his wife; for they are thoroughly respectable. Their chief fault in the management of their son has been over-indulgence, and want of home discipline, allowing him to associate with idle companions. How much mischief comes of over-indulgences! *My* surprise rather has been how such good and sensible people as the Burton's could like the young man himself."

"Oh! he was always on his best behaviour

there," observed Ellen; "he knew how to make the best of himself as well as any body."

"It would have been far happier for her," said Miss Bentinck, "if she had never wished to leave her happy home to go and learn millinery, for the sake of indulging her love of dress, and mixing in gay company. But it is not only in towns that this temptation to vanity is found; the love of dress finds its way in too readily, wherever there are silly young things to be caught by it; and to speak plainly, I fear it is gaining a fast hold on both of you, my dear Ellen and Harriet. Much precious time must be wasted on it; and when I see you in such smart things, even in church, I am really grieved. Only think how sad it would be if you were to bring upon yourself some unhappiness like Lucy's by silly vanity."

"Oh, ma'am! but I'm too young to think about such things as yet!"

"I dare say you *do* think of them, however, and wonder if your smart clothes are admired, and *yourself in them*; or else why do you wear them?"

Harriet looked conscious, and was silent.

"Besides, you are not too young for certain habits of mind to be forming within you; and it is very important that they should be good habits, and not bad."

"Well, ma'am," answered Harriet, "Clara has been talking to me about my hat: and I don't mean to wear it any more in church."

"I'm truly glad to hear that," answered Miss

Bentinck. "I wish you would deal as wisely with your *bonnet*, Ellen."

"I've been thinking myself," said Ellen, "that perhaps it would be better to take out the flowers: I heard some one say, as I was passing on Sunday, that it was just like a garland inside."

"Come, I really hope I shall have my girls all growing wiser at last," said Miss Bentinck, with a smile of real pleasure: and then she added, "now, look at Margaret's bonnet, and tell me truly if you do not feel in your secret hearts, that it is far more sensible, and more comely too, besides being more suited to her station, than yours."

"Well, *it is* more sensible-looking, certainly," answered Ellen; "but I don't feel quite so sure about its being more comely, if that means prettier."

"That's a matter of taste," rejoined Miss Bentinck; "*I* think it's *much* more comely; and, as to its being more suitable to your station, you did not tell me what you think of that."

"Well, ma'am," said Ellen, "all we wear is paid for honestly; and I suppose if that's the case, it can't be beyond our station."

"Not beyond the actual limits of your purse, perhaps; but is that quite a right measure to judge by? Consider; if you spend all you have on dress, do you not put it out of your power to do occasional little acts of charity? or even to help your parents?"

"You see, ma'am," said Harriet, "our parents don't want such help: and as to charity, the little we could save wouldn't do much in that way; besides, there are plenty of rich people to help the poor without us."

"My dear child," answered Miss Bentinck, "you are much mistaken on all the points you mention. First, you *could* help your parents *much*, by giving up extravagant tastes. Your father, though comfortably off, works hard for what he gains: the more you spend, the less, of course, he can lay by. And if the sums which you expend in finery were put into the Savings' Bank, you might make a little nest-egg for his comfort in old age. You might also be a much greater help to your mother: for I often see her hard at work about household matters, whilst you are spending your time in trimming your bonnets, or other such work. Then, as to the *little* you could give away, believe me, with economy, it might be more than you fancy. But quite independent of that, your smallest savings for charity, in the spirit of self-denial, and with a heart of love to God and man, are laid up for you in the treasury of Heaven. On the third point, you are more mistaken still. Do you suppose that because other people are charitable you will be excused for being otherwise? That is not the view given us in the Bible. We are each and all of us responsible for our own acts, without regard to what others do, or leave undone. The law of *charity* is universal, as our Blessed Saviour

teaches in the Parable of the traveller who fell among thieves. It is only a due acknowledgment from all, rich or poor, according to their ability, to make offerings to their Creator, by helping His suffering creatures. You remember the widow's mite; of which our Lord declared, 'Verily, I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury; for all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.'

"Oh!" said Ellen, "I never saw it in that light before. There must certainly be something wrong in our way of thinking, and acting too. I should like to get right about it."

"So should I," added Harriet. "Oh, dear me! we seem a good way off from it. Only think, ma'am," added she, almost with tears in her eyes as she spoke, "the very day of the fair, I saw poor Widow Charter, who lives down the lane, sitting at her scanty meal, which was only a dry crust and a little cold water to moisten it; and *I knew* it was all she would have till ten o'clock next morning, when she was to go for her parish-money and her loaf of bread; yet I actually never *thought* of giving her anything, but went and spent all I had in the fair!"

"Well," said Margaret, "Rose and Mary took her something; for they had also seen her distress. Mary gave her all the gingerbread she had bought, and Rose got an ounce of tea,

and two penny-worth of sugar, instead of buying anything for herself, and took it to her, with a little milk, which she ran home to beg of her mother ; so she had quite a comfortable tea."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Harriet ; "but," added she, sadly, "they got the blessing instead of me."

"Yes, they *did* get it," said Margaret ; "for poor Mrs. Charter was so grateful ; and when they left, she said, 'God bless you, my dears, for being so kind to a poor old woman.' Mary said it felt quite like a warm glow at her heart."

"No doubt it made them feel happy all the rest of the day," said Miss Bentinck, "and more than repaid what they must have lost of the sights and fairings ; for running to and fro must have taken up a good portion of their time."

"They said they had seen quite enough of it, when they came away," said Margaret. "I was only there for a few minutes, just in passing along the Green ; for mother was ill, and wanted me at home. But I declare the prettiest sight of all, to my mind, was to see those two, walking together, not seeming to wish for any of the things they saw. They looked quite different from most of the other people, who were so eager and busy. I could not help fancying that they were thinking of their Confirmation, and looked upon the trifles around them, as some of the vanities they would so soon be called upon to renounce."

"I am very happy to hear it," said Miss Ber

tinck. "They are steady, good girls, and I am very hopeful of their persevering in the right way. They are so humble and gentle, as well as steady. But, my dear Margaret, I think your mother may be wanting her tea, especially as you say she is not well, and it is getting dusk."

Margaret was too well trained in habits of ready obedience to hesitate for an instant, or allow herself to question in her own mind what other reason Miss Bentinck might have for hastening her departure, without bidding Ellen and Harriet to go too. *They* seemed to understand that she had something more to say to them, and remained. As soon as Margaret had closed the door, Miss Bentinck said, "*You* have but a very little way to run home, and I wish to say just one thing more to you. You cannot fail to observe how consistent and good Margaret is in all her ways, and *therefore* how happy and peaceful she looks. I do not think I know any one, high or low, who bears in her face a sweeter expression of contentment and peace. She has a true, earnest love to God, and to all things belonging to His service. Towards her mother she has always been a devoted obedient daughter; and towards her little brothers and to her neighbours, she shows a kindly loving spirit, which may indeed be called charity. I could not, of course, say this in her presence; but I am sure you must feel the truth of it."

"Yes, indeed," answered Ellen; "she is very

good, and I wish Harriet and I were both like her. Our home would be much happier, and ourselves, too."

"Well, then, will you try? You *would indeed*, be much happier. Why not seek out Margaret's company a little more than you do, instead of being so much with Susan, and those silly friends of hers, who are so dressy and thoughtless? I really believe a great deal of your love of smart things has been caused by your intimacy with them. Perhaps you are afraid lest they should think you less genteel than yourselves, if less well-dressed."

Ellen and Harriet looked at each other, for they felt that Miss Bentinck had got quite at "*the Root of the Matter*." It *was* the bad example of these silly girls which had begun the mischief, and this they felt.

"I am the more anxious to speak to you of this now," said Miss Bentinck, "because you, Harriet, as one of the candidates for Confirmation, should think seriously what you are about to undertake, and to promise. I am sure you *must* feel that those silly things which have occupied so much of your thoughts, *are really* the very 'pomps and vanities,' you have to renounce, if you mean to live like a true Christian."

"I do," said Harriet, earnestly; "and I see that I must give them up. I never before understood so plainly how contrary they are to our profession."

"You know how constantly Mr. Bernard

has warned you against these at the Confirmation-class. And he would never have done so, if he did not know the danger of them."

"No, that I'm sure; and he has spoken of it several times in the class, and in private, too. Last Sunday, when he met me going home after Church in my poor unfortunate hat, he spoke to me about it very seriously. And now, ma'am, you have cut us up so to the very roots, it certainly will never appear again."

"Well," said Miss Bentinck, pleased and amused at the girl's hearty resolve, "I hope if the roots have (as you say) been so cut up, they *will not* sprout again. But you must keep watch, for it does often so happen. And now, remember, this time of your Confirmation is a *golden opportunity*. Do not let it pass without gaining the *full* blessing of it, which depends on your humbly seeking the Grace of God, and firmly resolving, in His strength, to 'keep His holy will and commandments until your life's end.' And afterwards, be well on your guard to perform your vows."

"I will, indeed," said Harriet; "and I feel as if it would be quite easy to me now to withstand Hester and Amelia, and Susan too, if they try to persuade us into follies again; for I shall tell them I have *promised*, indeed *vowed*, to renounce them."

"May you be enabled to keep firm to your good resolutions, dear child," said Miss Bentinck. "But you must not trust in your own strength, or you will find them, 'like a morning cloud

which passeth away.' It must be by a daily and hourly looking up to God for help, that you can alone hope to resist; for temptations *will* arise again, and come upon you in new and unexpected forms, often difficult to overcome. And now, my dear Ellen, one word with you," continued Miss Bentinck, taking her hand kindly into her own, "*You have been Confirmed; you have had your golden opportunity.* You then solemnly renewed the promise and vow made in your name at your Baptism; 'ratifying and confirming the same in your own person, and acknowledging yourself bound to believe, and to do, all those things which your god-fathers and godmothers then undertook for you.' Now, *have* you kept that solemn promise? I remember you were steady and quiet for a time afterwards; but have you not gone back again to the love of the world, and of those pomps and vanities you then owned yourself bound to renounce? I do not ask you to answer it *to me*, but I beg you to examine your heart seriously before God, and confess to Him, with true sorrow, all your silly wanderings. Do not delay; let this very night find you on your knees seeking strength from our Heavenly Father, and let your future conduct show that your heart is fixed on the love of God. Though you have lost many great opportunities, He will graciously give you others still. You have now a special warning in the case of poor Lucy; you have good examples before you in Margaret, Rose, and Mary. Make use of the *present*,

which is the only opportunity you can for certain call your own."

The tears were in Ellen's eyes, and she could only answer, "I will."

But those words were a real joy to Miss Bentinck, as well as a relief to Ellen's burdened mind; and the two sisters returned home with firm resolutions of becoming wiser and better.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONFIRMATION.

THE day of Confirmation at length arrived; the sun rose bright over the distant hills. A fine sun-rise is always an exhilarating sight; but especially on the morning of any great event, and when we have been wishing that the weather and all things might smile upon it. So the brightness of that morning was refreshing to many a young heart, filled with hopes of a day fraught with blessings. Nor to the young ones alone: for all who had rejoiced in its approach for their sakes, and had remembered them in their prayers, were no less pleased to see the morning smile upon them. It seemed to be a type of that Sun of Righteousness, Who should "arise upon us with healing in His beams," *shedding throughout our whole life His saving life and grace.* Mr. Bernard's first waking

thoughts, too, were with the young members of his flock; thoughts of joy and thankfulness, to see so bright a beginning to the day, which he hoped would seal many unto a brighter and a better world. Fervent indeed were his prayers that none might be found wanting in faithfulness to their holy calling and profession; but that all might be enabled to persevere, and remain "stedfast unto the end."

The appointed hour of Service arrived. Many were the candidates for the holy rite; occupying the whole nave of the Church; the women and girls on one side, the men and boys on the other. The remaining space and side aisles were soon filled by the parishioners, anxious to join in the Service, and to witness so many who were about to dedicate themselves and their future lives to the Lord. Miss Bentinck and the teachers of the young were also present, and others who had taken their share in the schools, or in other ways had prepared them for this important day. None can tell what had been the incessant watchfulness of the anxious Clergy, who had devoted themselves to the training of the old and young, that they might be made sensible of the greatness of the occasion. Nor less thrilling was the interest of many a parent then present, who owned one, or perhaps more in that goodly number!

The solemn Service itself could not fail to impress the minds and hearts, not of the young only, but of some older persons too, who were to be confirmed, with a deep sense of their responsi-

bility, in renewing and taking upon themselves the vows made for them in their Baptism. After the Service, such of the young people as lived in the village returned quietly to their own homes, whilst others, who had come from a distance, were made welcome at the Rectory. Mr. Bernard assembled them in his study for a short thanksgiving prayer, and afterwards they were invited to partake of a simple meal provided for them; at the conclusion of which they spent a pleasant hour in walking about the Rectory garden. In this they were soon joined by the other newly Confirmed, who had been asked to return in the afternoon. Mr. Bernard joined in their walks, and talked kindly to them on various subjects, till it drew near to the time for an afternoon Service. Before they went, he addressed to them a few earnest words of advice and encouragement for their future course; reminding them of the Bishop's exhortations, and beseeching them earnestly to join in the praises and thanksgivings of the Church, that the blessing so lately pronounced upon them by the Bishop might show itself effectually in their after-lives. He then preceded them to the Church, whither they all followed; and having ranged themselves orderly and devoutly as before, joined with him in the evening Services. No doubt they returned home strengthened in good desires and resolutions.

The Rector followed them beyond the Church-yard gate, to the place where he had prepared conveyances for such as had come from a dis-

tance, and there he took leave of them with words of kindness and blessing. He had observed with pleasure, that the greater part had attended to his expressed wish to come simply dressed ; although some few, indeed, were smarter than he liked to see them on such an occasion. But it did not escape his notice, that Harriet, and others whose names we have not mentioned, had carefully avoided anything like display.

THE
ROOT OF THE MATTER.

Part II.

CHAPTER VII.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

ON the day after the Confirmation, Miss Bentinck thought she would go and look after poor Lucy, whom she had not seen since the events of the Fair, thinking it better to leave her entirely in Mr. Bernard's hands. Now, however, it seemed a good opportunity for a friendly call. The door was opened to her by Mrs. Burton, who with true maternal kindness had taken that office from Lucy, perceiving how much she shrunk from the observation of her neighbours. She was a judicious and watchful mother, doing all she could to restore her to cheerfulness, yet feeling that the best way to bring her child to a peaceful state of mind was to encourage her to be constantly occupied in household duties, as formerly. Louisa, too, not only took her own full share of

work, but would often help Lucy in her's, when she observed her to be tired or unwell; for she was a kind-hearted girl, and loved her sister dearly.

Lucy could not but feel how much they all cherished her; and she struggled bravely against her sorrow, for their sakes, as well as her own. She had not forgotten old Watson's good advice; and consistently endeavoured to act upon it, so that her countenance was gradually assuming its former cheerful expression: for her mind was at peace, in the consciousness of striving to do right. It is true, sad and regretful thoughts would occasionally come over her, and she could not help at times feeling troubled about another, lest, after all, he should disregard the severe lesson he had received; but she let the matter rest, committing every thing to God.

On entering Mrs. Burton's little parlour, Miss Bentinck found Lucy sitting at her work: she rose to receive her, and looked pleased at this visit from her old friend. Miss Bentinck shook hands with her kindly, and Lucy's face lighted up with a smile, almost as bright as it used to be, before these days of sorrow came upon her. Miss Bentinck was very glad to find her so much more cheerful than she had expected. She avoided any direct allusion to the one subject, which was uppermost in the minds of both; but conversed pleasantly on Lucy's present life and occupations, expressing much *pleasure* in her being at home again, and telling *her how often* she had observed her mother *looking solitary and wearied*, while both sh

and Louisa were absent in the town. "*Now*, with two good daughters," added Miss Bentinck, smiling, "she need never be oppressed with household cares."

"Indeed, I hope she never will again," answered Lucy. "I thought her looking sadly altered, when we came back: it was very thoughtless of us to leave her quite alone. Father, too, I think, looks happier now: mother says he used to miss us very much."

"No doubt he did; I always greatly regret children leaving their parents, unless circumstances make it more desirable to go to service. It seems to me so much more natural and right to remain with them, and endeavour to cheer their declining years. Thus it is we can best repay their tender care of us in our infancy, and their forbearance, during so many years, with all our faults."

"Yes, ma'am," said Lucy, "I now feel the truth of all this; and would gladly recall the past."

"Well, answered Miss Bentinck, "we may learn much from our very failures and faults. It is mercifully placed within our power to redeem the time, and to overcome former weaknesses."

"I shall be very thankful, if I am enabled to do so. I sometimes feel but a poor, worthless thing, and not fit for any real good in the world: but when father and mother seem more *cheerful in having me with them, I can realize better than I did how pleasant it is to make them happy. But my best comfort is to ge*

some quiet minutes alone in my own little room, to read a few verses in the Bible, and pray over them. At such times, with the fresh breeze coming in from the window, and the sweet smell of the honey-suckle which covers the porch, a more peaceful feeling comes across me than I ever knew before."

"That I can quite understand, dear Lucy; for, when once the heart ceases to be governed by the natural will, and yields itself to the will of our Lord, He pours into it a healing balm. Indeed, He only can make us to know and feel that His presence is the most real refreshment and rest of the mind. And the more we seek Him, the more He draws us on to love Him above all; for He '*is Love*,'—the very Saviour and Redeemer of our souls, 'the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.' (Cant. v. 10.) Whether we trace His steps in His miracles of mercy, as recorded in the Gospels, or meditate on His bitter sufferings and Death, to save us from eternal death,—or in spirit behold Him ascended up on high, and now interceding for us at the right hand of God, all is Love unspeakable. Moreover, "He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." His love never fails or disappoints us. Thus, while too often earthly love and joys fade away, He alone remains constant, if only we, on our part, remain faithful to Him."

"Yes," answered Lucy, "I know that all this is true; and that they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, to '*walk and not faint*:' and, indeed, I do long to walk more

firmly in His ways ; though I confess I *am* too often weary and faint."

"Then, the more you 'wait upon Him,' the less you will feel this. Lean on Him for strength, and it *will* be renewed to you ; and in that strength you will be enabled to walk, nay, to run, with a willing heart in His ways, till at length you 'shall mount up with wings as eagles,' and rise above the world."

"Indeed, ma'am, I *do try*, and *will* strive for it more and more ; for I see clearly that there is no other real happiness or rest to the soul but in His Love, and would rather give up all than fail of that."

"I believe you would, dear Lucy ; indeed, you have given up something for His sake already ; and the peace which you now feel is the consequence of it. You see how lovingly He repays every sacrifice we make to Him. You may receive this as a pledge of further grace : for the promise is sure to all who will receive it, and prepare their hearts for it ; 'He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ : ' and *then* we shall be His for ever. I rejoice that you are doing your best to improve the grace already given you ; and since by God's mercy you have now attained to a true view of your duties, I doubt not that you will be more and more strengthened in them. Try to forget yourself, and your own troubles, that you may live more for others."

"Yes, indeed, I will," answered Lucy ; "for *whenever* I do, there seems to come a ray of

light and peace straight down into my heart, which sets all right."

"May you be strengthened in this purpose, my dear Lucy, and then all will be well."

After a little general conversation, Miss Bentinck rose, and took a kind leave of her. Lucy felt much cheered by this visit from one who cared so truly for her; and said, as she gratefully pressed her hand, "do come again soon, ma'am, if you please." Miss Bentinck readily promised; and as she left the house, and pursued her way home, she rejoiced to have found in the simple mind of her young friend light and peace, where she had rather expected a shadow of gloom; and said to herself, "here is some of our good pastor's work."

As she proceeded on her way, her thoughts turned to the newly confirmed, some of whom lived in the cottages hard by. She felt hopeful that many of their hearts glowed with a warmth which would not grow cold. She did not expect, that all would retain alike the brightness of the Light which had beamed on their hearts, or that all would be equally steadfast: but her thoughts were cheerful; she looked on the bright side.

Thus musing, she came within sight of the common, across which lay her path home; and here she met Susan. "Oh, ma'am," exclaimed she, "I'm so glad to meet you. I've just been at your house, and was quite disappointed that you were not at home."

Miss Bentinck was taken by surprise at the *earnestness* of Susan's manner. It was some

time since they had met: indeed, she had observed that Susan seemed rather to avoid her.

"What is the matter, Susan?" asked she, observing her troubled and anxious look.

"Oh, ma'am! haven't you heard about poor Mary Ann? She's so very ill."

"No, indeed," answered Miss Bentinck; "it is so long since I have seen or heard anything of her, that I thought she must have gone to service, or left the village altogether."

"She did leave, some time ago, ma'am; and well it would have been for her, if she had not: but she was over-persuaded. It's a sad story altogether; but I've no right to tell it. I only came to let you know how ill she is. If you will please to go and see her mother, she will tell you all about it. Oh! I do so wish you could be with poor Mary Ann: they say she is dying."

"Indeed! I am grieved to hear it," said Miss Bentinck. "I will go at once to her mother, and see what can be done. It was right and kind of you to come and tell me."

Susan was pleased at these few words of praise; she felt that they were more than she deserved;—especially just now, when so many others of her own age had received the blessing of Confirmation, which she might also have done, but for her own fault. She was conscious how she had neglected her opportunities. These thoughts were passing rapidly through her mind; and (though not without a little struggle) she mustered courage to say, "Please, ma'am, I hear you have begun again with the class, and *I should be very glad to join in it once more, if I may.*"

"You are quite welcome to do so, Susan," answered Miss Bentinck, "if you really mean to attend regularly: but it must be on that condition; otherwise it is not only useless to yourself, but you set a bad example to the younger ones."

"Indeed, ma'am, I will be regular now, if you will allow me to begin again. I have felt the miss of it much more than I expected; and I really believe that, if I had continued to come steadily, like the rest, I should never have got into such careless ways, or been put back from my Confirmation."

"Perhaps not; and you have certainly lost a great blessing. But strive to do better from this time forward, and we may hope that another opportunity will be granted you."

"I hope so," answered Susan, with a sigh; "but I'm afraid it will be some time first; however, I must now wait with patience."

"Meanwhile, try to prepare yourself; and all may yet be well. But I must not delay longer, for Mrs. Hastings' cottage is some way off."

So saying, she turned to go; but observing that Susan lingered as if wishing to ask something more, she guessed what it was, and said, "The class-days are Tuesdays and Fridays, and we begin at five o'clock punctually; so mind you are in good time; but remember, I expect to see you always come neat and clean."

Susan coloured at this remark, for she felt that her appearance at that moment was not very creditable. She could be smart on grand occasions; but, like many others, was far from

being tidy in her general habits. Miss Bentinck was gone before she could reply. Susan remained fixed to the spot for some minutes. She was feeling inwardly ashamed, and made a firm resolution to amend. Miss Bentinck meanwhile pursued her way, rejoicing at this gleam of hope which had appeared where she least expected it.

On coming to Mrs. Hastings' cottage, she tapped gently at the door ; but receiving no answer, lifted the latch and went in. There she found the poor mother, (who had been too much wrapped in her own sorrowful thoughts to hear her knock) sitting before the remains of a scanty fire, her arms resting helplessly on her knees, her head drooping, and her tearful eyes gazing intently upon the embers. She felt sure that it must be some heavy cloud of sorrow, which could thus depress a person generally so active and stirring.

"I am very sorry to find you in trouble, Mrs. Hastings ; I have only just heard of Mary Ann's illness."

"No, ma'am ; it's sudden, so to say—*very* sudden. To be sure, she's been ailing some time, but it's no more than was to be expected ; it's all her own doing. I told her what would come of it. Oh ! it's enough to break one's heart."

"Poor thing," said Miss Bentinck, kindly, "I am very sorry for you ; but tell me what has happened ; perhaps something may still be done."

"Oh, ma'am," answered the poor mother, "I'm afraid nothing can be done. It's too late,

—too late!” and her voice was almost choked with sobs.

“Be calm, and tell me what has happened; I know nothing as yet.”

Mrs. Hastings tried to collect herself, and said, “Well, ma’am, I suppose you have heard all about Mary Ann’s first leaving home?”

“No, indeed,” answered Miss Bentinck, “I have heard nothing. I had missed her from Church on Sundays, but you know she was never very regular in her attendance, and I thought she must have gone out to service, or might perhaps be staying with her aunt, as she did last year.”

“Ah! I wish that *had* been the reason of her absence; and yet I’ve cause enough to grieve that she ever went to her aunt’s, as she used to do. It was there she first made acquaintance with that Dick Summers, who could make such fine speeches as were enough to turn any young girl’s head:—and her’s was soon turned, poor thing!”

“Who is Dick Summers?” asked Miss Bentinck; “any one whom you had known before?”

“No, indeed,” answered Mrs. Hastings; “he’s not one that either her father or I should have chosen as fit company for her. He was a young fellow from London, some friend of her cousin George, who’s not over steady himself. He came down there to spend Sunday, while Mary Ann was at her aunt’s, and seems to have been much struck with her at first sight. He said she was worth a dozen of the pale sickly *looking* London girls; and with other such silly

compliments he wound his way into her poor young heart, till she was quite unsettled."

"But surely, her aunt did not allow him to return without letting you know what was going on?"

"Indeed she did; and very wrong it was of her. He came down Sunday after Sunday, and often in the week, too, till the intimacy became confirmed before we knew anything about it. We wondered at her not writing, or offering to come home, as the visit was already over-long; so at last I wrote, saying that I wanted her back, and she must come at once. I had a letter from her in return, begging to stay a few days longer—just over her aunt's birth-day, when they were to have a party of friends to tea. I did not like to refuse; but bade her come home the day after, without fail. She did so; but unwillingly; and I perceived, from the very hour of her return, that a great change had come over her mind. Every thing in the way of work, in which she used to give me willing help, now seemed tiresome to her. She would murmur at the hard lot of the poor, wishing she had been born a lady, and saying such things as I had never heard from her before. Her increasing love for fine dress, too, greatly annoyed both her father and me. In short, she was quite an altered girl.

"Besides all this, she had a restless, unsettled manner, as if her mind was dwelling upon something which kept her ill-at-ease. I often tried gently to draw from her what was thus weighing upon her thoughts; but never could prevail upon

her to tell me. At length one day the postman came to the door with a letter for her father and another for herself, which seemed to put her all in a flutter. She tried to slip it into her pocket unobserved by me, while she laid her father's on the shelf against his return. 'Come, my dear,' said I, 'you need not be afraid to read your letter before me; I was once young myself, and can guess something of what troubles you; sit down and read your letter, and don't be afraid of telling your mother everything.' She accordingly sat down, broke the seal, and read eagerly. When she had done she looked up quickly at me, and seeing that I was watching her with affectionate interest, and not severely, she rose, and coming towards me, threw her arms round me, and said, 'Dear mother, don't be angry, and I'll tell you all; for he says he must come down and see me.' She then related the whole matter from the beginning.

"When she had done, I chid her gently for letting the matter go so far without our knowledge; and showed her in what difficulties she might have been placed by such concealment. 'Why, child,' said I, 'suppose I had not been in the way when this letter came, would you have told me of it?' 'I am not sure that I should, mother,' answered she. "Well, then," said I, 'would you have gone to meet him, and never told us that either?' Her silence showed that it would most likely have been so. 'Well now, child,' said I, 'only think how much mischief that might have led to,—more, perhaps, than *you may think* for. And why should you be

afraid of speaking openly to your parents, when their only thought is for your happiness?' 'Well, then, mother,' says she, '*will* you let him come and see me?' 'I'd *much rather* have him come,' answered I, 'that we may see whether he's one we should approve of.' 'Oh you can't but approve of him,' said Mary Ann; 'he's such a genteel young man; I'm sure you'll like him.'

"In spite of all this praise I had strange misgivings; I couldn't help fearing that he might be some flashy young fellow, worth little in reality, who had turned her head. And such, ma'am, he has too surely proved to be. He came down the following Sunday; but we were by no means pleased with him. There was something in his manner so presumptuous and haughty, as if nothing was good enough for him; and he was always talking of gaiety, and things of that sort. He asked Mary Ann if she didn't find the country very dull; and said he hoped soon to have a nice little home in town ready for her, where she should be as gay as a lark, and as happy as a queen. This was more than her father was prepared to stand; so, says he, 'Not so fast, young sir; I'm not used to travel at that pace; I like to see where I'm going, and make sure of my road.' 'Oh, as to that,' returned he, 'I can give you plenty of good references.' 'Well, then, do so,' said Hastings; 'I'm not a man to take a prejudice either way; I like fair dealings, and prudence, too; so we must get somewhat better acquainted before anything can be settled. You can come down of a Sunday, *when you please*, and we shall see how matters

go.' Mary Ann's eyes glistened; and I saw Dick Summers give her a sly wink, as much as to say all would go right now: still, we were anything but satisfied.

"After this—but I'm afraid, ma'am, I shall tire you with all my sad story before I come to the end."

"No; pray go on," said Miss Bentinck; "I am deeply interested in every word, and feel very much for your troubles."

"Thank you—thank you, Miss Bentinck; and I'm sure you *will* feel for us, when you know all. From that time he came down several Sundays, one after another, to see Mary Ann. Meanwhile, Hastings made all the enquiries he could about him, and I wrote to my sister to hear more. The parties to whom he had referred were flashy kind of people like himself, and my husband didn't think much of their recommendation. From my sister I could only learn that she had received him as a friend of her son George; and that she could not think otherwise than well of any chosen friend of his. As to my reproaches for not having given me due notice of the growing intimacy between him and Mary Ann, she only answered, that she could not find it in her heart to stand in the way of such a chance; indeed she had felt sure it would be all right, when I saw what a fine young fellow he was, such as would make quite a lady of her. It was poor comfort to be told this; for I couldn't feel as she did about him. Well, Sunday after Sunday passed, and we liked him less and less; for as he grew more at his ease, he

talked of play-houses and dancing, and such like things, as if he thought of nothing else; and my husband felt more and more convinced that he was a loose vulgar fellow, in spite of all his parade. Besides this, we found out that he and Mary Ann never went to Church, as they pretended to do, but spent all the time in walking about together.

“At last Hastings could bear it no longer, and one day said to him, ‘I tell you what, Mr. Summers, I must set things on a different footing; I can’t have you coming here any more after this fashion. Go you and attend to your business steadily for a year; and then we’ll see if you’re likely to make a good husband for Mary Ann.’ ‘Business, indeed!’ answered he, quite offended; ‘Do you think I’m doing no business in the week, because I manage to get down here on Sunday? There’s plenty of business in town for such as know how to make the best of it; and I reckon there’s more gold growing on my trees than on yours.’ ‘Well,’ said Hastings, ‘I should like to know what your business is? All is not gold that glitters.’ ‘Why,’ answered he, haughtily, ‘I am sure they were first-rate references I gave you, and if you can’t make me out from them, it’s no use trying to satisfy you. If you don’t choose your daughter to be made a lady of, when you’ve such a good chance, there are plenty of others who would not object.’ Upon this he got up, as if to go away. ‘Oh, Dick!’ exclaimed poor Mary Ann, ‘how can you be so cruel? You surely won’t leave me like that!’ ‘Only for a time,

my deary,' answered he, 'till I've shape wedding-ring according to your father's like. So saying, he opened the door; and as he pressed her hand at parting, I heard him whisper, 'It will all come right, if we take it quietly; you'll see.' This seemed to satisfy her; and though I appeared no more for some weeks, she seemed cheerful and contented.

"Nothing more passed to our knowledge, till the morning of the Fair, when I fancied I heard the postman come to the door and give in a letter. Mary Ann was down stairs setting the breakfast-things, as I thought; but when I came down, I soon saw that she must have been doing something else; for the table was only half laid, the kettle boiling over, and no tea made. 'Why, child! what ever are you thinking of?' said I. 'Your father will have to go with only half a breakfast.' She made no answer, but began bustling about to make amends for lost time. 'Was that the postman?' asked I. 'No,' answered she quickly; it was only the old pedlar.' But I could see that she looked flushed and uneasy, though she kept her face turned away from me. 'Mary Ann,' said I, 'you're not deceiving me, are you?' 'Oh mother! how can you think that?' was all the answer she gave; and I let the matter drop, for I heard her father's step on the stairs, and was unwilling to get her into trouble with him. After breakfast, she busied herself about the house; but I observed that she kept out of the way as much as possible, doing the up-stairs rooms, while I was *arranging things* below; and when I came up,

she seemed to recollect something that must be done down-stairs.

"At last, she said, 'Mother, do you mean to go to the Fair?' 'No, I shall not be able to go,' said I; 'I've some business that must be attended to; but I've asked Mrs. Brown to call in for you, as I knew you were anxious to go;—and I don't wish you to go alone.' 'Thank you, mother,' said she; 'I am glad you can spare me: for I've promised Susan and Hester to meet them there, and I should be sorry to disappoint them.' The matter being thus settled, she proceeded to get herself ready; and a very spruce turn out she made. I couldn't help feeling a bit proud of her, and thinking she looked as like a lady as might be; though I'd as lief she hadn't made up quite such a fine bonnet, with bugles stuck all round the edge. Besides, her excited look, together with what had passed in the morning, gave me an uneasy feeling which I could not shake off. 'Child,' said I, as I gave her a kiss at parting, 'take care of yourself, and keep with Mrs. Brown. If any harm should come to you, it would break my heart. She kissed me affectionately in return, and said, 'Don't be afraid, mother.' The tears stood in her eyes, and I felt as if it was a sin to doubt that pretty, innocent-looking face. The afternoon passed, and I sat down to my solitary tea; for my husband had told me that he should be late home that evening; and I knew Mary Ann would not return for some time, though I had begged her not to be late.

"Well, after this I took my work, and sat

hour after hour by myself. The time seemed to hang heavy, and I could not shake off my uneasiness. It was now past eight o'clock, and she had not yet returned. I grew more and more anxious, and went often to the door to look out: but no one was to be seen. At last a group of two or three persons came in sight, and as they drew nearer, I saw that it was Mrs. Brown and her daughters, but without Mary Ann. I went to meet them. 'Where is she?' cried I. 'Indeed, neighbour, I wish I could tell you,' answered Mrs. Brown; 'I did my best to keep her with me, but she was always getting away on one pretext or another; sometimes to look at this show, sometimes at that,—always just the things my girls didn't care to see, as if on purpose to be by herself. I can't help suspecting she was on the look-out for somebody; her eyes were so sharp in every direction. At last, when it got quite dusk, she fairly gave us the slip, just as we turned the corner of the booths to come home; and although we went back again to look for her, and walked to and fro for some time, till I was quite tired out, she was no where to be found. I really could search no more;—so I told two or three of the neighbours, and begged them to look for her, and bring her safe home with them.'

"Did you see any one with her? have you any idea who she seemed expecting to meet?" asked I.

"No one was with her any time that we caught sight of her; but I can't help having a *guess as to who it was she was looking out for*;

because, as we came towards the end of the booths, we met a party of young fellows, one of whom asked another if he had seen Dick Summers, and was answered, "Oh yes, he's here, sure enough; several have seen him."

"This news seemed to fall like a cold chill upon me; but to my great relief, I now saw Hastings coming along the lane, and running to meet him, quickly told him all. He seemed, as it were, thunderstruck for a moment; but, recovering himself, immediately gave me his pack to carry home, and started off at once for the Fair. I watched him for a few minutes, as he strode along; but he was soon out of sight: and I then returned to the house to prepare his supper, which I knew he would doubly need after all his exertions. My hopes revived now that he was gone in search of her: I hardly allowed to my own mind a doubt of his success. In about an hour he returned, as pale as ashes, and with such a look of misery as I had never seen in his face before. 'Wife, she's gone!' cried he, as he entered, and flung himself heavily on the nearest chair, quite exhausted, body and mind. 'Gone!' cried I; 'what ever do you mean?' 'Yes, gone!' he repeated, 'and with that wretch, Dick Summers. Oh, if I could but catch him, I'd make him feel it!' 'But is there no hope?' said I, 'can't they be overtaken?' 'None, none,' answered he; 'they're off in a post-chay: it must all have been planned beforehand. No one could say they had seen them together till the last moment. On the contrary, *he seems purposely to have kept away from her,*

and out of sight, until it was quite dusk ; and then he ordered out this post-chay, which he had bespoken early in the afternoon, and the hostler tells me that the moment it appeared he said he must go and fetch his sister (as he called her), who was waiting for him in one of the tents. The man heard him give a whistle at the entrance of the line of booths, where she joined him instantly, and they got in, and drove off.' ' Ah then, she's gone, indeed !' said I, ' but are you *sure* it *was* Mary Ann ?' ' Lack-a-day ! there's no doubt of that ; for he was heard to say in a low voice, " Come, Mary Ann, make haste," though they didn't think much of it, till they heard me enquiring after her ; and it was getting rather dark ; so they could hardly see her face : besides she had on a thick veil.'

" You may well suppose, ma'am, what a distress it has been, and every endeavour to find them out has failed hitherto. We only know they must be somewhere in London. She wrote to me soon after, signing herself Mary Ann Summers, and saying that ' she was very happy, and would come and see us soon, and bring us some fine presents ;' but seeming little to feel all the pain she had given us. We heard no more after that, till about ten days ago, when she wrote again, saying she had been feeling very unwell for some weeks, and wishing I could come and see her ; but that her husband did not like having strangers in the house, and, in fact, they had no spare room.' I could see the poor thing was longing for me, but the letter had no *date* ; and how to find her I knew not. I have

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reason to believe now, that he would not let her give any direction, not choosing to have us come.

"At last, a third letter came this morning. Here it is," added she, handing it to Miss Bentinck to read; "and you may judge if it's not enough to break one's heart;—to have her stolen away like that, and now laid on her dying bed;—we not knowing where to find her!" and with these words she burst into a flood of tears. Miss Bentinck, much affected with the poor woman's grief, took the letter, and read as follows:—

"DEAR MOTHER,

"I am very ill, and feel as if I were fast going out of this world. Do come to me, I long to see you once more, and to hear you say you forgive all the past, before I die.

"Your poor sorrowful child,

"MARY ANN."

"This is, indeed, all most sad!" said Miss Bentinck, much grieved; "and again no direction! she must, however, have intended to give it this time, as she so earnestly begs you to go to her. Poor thing! I suppose she was too ill to know quite what she was about. But do not despair. I will go at once to Mr. Bernard, and see what he can advise. Let me take him the letter; perhaps he will himself endeavour to find out where she is, and the postmark may serve as a guide."

Mrs. Hastings willingly assented. "It would, indeed, be a blessing if he could be with her *at the last*; and oh! I wish I could be too."

"Perhaps even this may be managed; put together a few things, such as you may want; I have no doubt, if Mr. Bernard thinks any good can come of his seeking her out, he will contrive to take you with him."

"Oh, thank you, ma'am! that is, indeed, something to hope for."

"I cannot promise, of course," said Miss Bentinck; "but you shall know this evening;" and having thus imparted a ray of hope, and bid her trust in God's mercy, she left her to get herself ready, and hurried at once to the Rectory. Mr. Bernard was deeply grieved at this account, and said, "Here is one of those sad cases in which you can trace the germs of evil from early youth. Her uncorrected vanity and self-will have often made me uneasy about her; and nothing I could say to her parents ever had any effect in persuading them to be more strict with her: being an only child, she has been quite spoilt. However, we must do what we can; and that at once, or it may be too late."

The early morning saw Mr. Bernard on his way. He called at Mrs. Hastings' cottage; and they were not very long in reaching London. They drove at once to the post-office from which the letter had been sent,—where the name of Summers was known; and they were at once directed to No. 5 in a neat row of houses, in an airy situation not far off. Mr. Bernard knocked at the door, which was opened to them by a young girl, who said, at first, that her mistress was too *ill to see any one but the doctor*. "Ah! she'll

see her mother, poor thing," answered Mrs. Hastings; "she wrote for me to come." There was no making any further objection; and the girl at once showed her up stairs. Mr. Bernard waited in the little parlour below, till he should be called. He would not interrupt the first meeting of the mother and her long-lost child.

The bed-room, which Mrs. Hastings now entered, had an air of comfort—indeed of luxury, compared with Mary Ann's former life in her cottage home. Many little elegancies struck her eye at the first glance; but in an instant all her thoughts were fixed on the pallid cheeks, and emaciated form of her poor daughter, who looked, indeed, as if she were under the very shadow of death. She was asleep. The servant girl had left the room, after having placed a chair near the bed for Mrs. Hastings. No sooner were they left alone than the poor mother sunk upon her knees by the bed-side, and hiding her face in her hands, prayed to God that He would mercifully spare the life of her child. Never before, perhaps, had she prayed so fervently; and who but a parent can tell the depth of her feelings? For some minutes the poor patient stirred not: but she was only dozing; and a sob which broke involuntarily from Mrs. Hastings aroused her to consciousness.

"Oh mother! is that you?" exclaimed she.

"Yes, my child; and I thank God that I have found you at last."

"Dearest mother! Can you forgive me?"

"Yes, my poor child, all is forgiven. But

why did you so long delay to write? and *then* not say where you were?"

"Ah! I would have done so; but he would not let me."

"Why such mystery? Was he ashamed to have us, poor folks, come to see their own child?"

An expression of deep grief came over the countenance of Mary Ann; she pressed her pale hands to her eyes, as if afraid to look upon her mother. Mrs. Hastings at once perceived that there was no wedding ring on her finger; the whole sad, fatal truth too surely flashed upon her mind in an instant.

"My child! Mary Ann!" said she, in a low but searching voice, taking her thin hand within her own, "how is this? where is your wedding ring?"

"Ah, mother! mother!" answered poor Mary Ann, in a despairing tone, "I have been deceived,—cruelly deceived! he kept saying there was no hurry;—that it would be better delayed till we were comfortably settled . . . always one excuse or another, putting it off: and now—now, it's all too late! Oh! that I had never left my happy home, and my dear parents!"

Mrs. Hastings let go the hand: her head sunk upon the bed; the terrible silence was at length broken by Mary Ann in a low, whispering voice: "Mother, mother! can you ever forgive me?"

"My poor child! Yes, I forgive you; and so will your father, too. But it is your *Heavenly*

Father's forgiveness you must seek,—How to answer it to Him."

"Ah!" said the dying girl, with an agonized look, "that's the hardest part of all. Would that I knew how! I do pray to Him continually; but oh, it seems as if I could get no answer to my cries. It's like a thick, dark cloud all round me, and as if I couldn't find which way to seek Him. Oh, if only Mr. Bernard could be with me now, and teach me all over again! I do think he would come to see me, if he knew how short my time is."

"He does know it, my dear, and he has come; he is here now."

"Is it possible? Blessed be God! Oh let me see him: quick! quick! the time is short;—very short."

Mrs. Hastings rose at once to call Mr. Bernard from the little parlour: she explained in few words the full misery of the case. As he entered the sick-room, Mary Ann clasped her hands in thankfulness; but dared not speak. He signed to Mrs. Hastings to leave them alone. "Go and rest awhile," he said; "you will need strength for your watch."

We do not venture to intrude on the sacredness of that interview,—the sorrowful out-pouring of the poor wanderer's broken heart, or the earnest exhortations and prayers of the good pastor. On coming down from her room, he said to her mother, "I will not stay longer with her now; she is nearly exhausted: but I shall remain in town a few days, and see her *constantly, as long as it may please God to spare her.*"

"Thank you, thank you, sir!" answered the poor mother: "and I'll watch by her, you may be sure."

"Keep her as quiet as you can," said Mr. Bernard; "that we may make the best of her last opportunity."

He came again next day, and the day after; for she was mercifully spared so long to listen to his words of admonition, bending her soul to the foot of the cross in earnest penitential prayer, and mingling words of comfort; for doubtless her repentance and remorse were deep and true. But her wasted frame grew rapidly weaker and weaker. Her sorrowing mother never for an instant left her; and gained some comfort from hearing her speak of hope in her blessed Saviour, though it was a trembling hope; at times it seemed to vanish away, and the former despairing thoughts to return: but she was learning the only way to seek and to find pardon. The end, however, was come;—Hastings had been sent for: he was in time to speak a father's forgiveness and blessing, and to join in the prayers for the visitation of the sick, when Mr. Bernard commended her departing spirit into the hands of her Creator and Redeemer. The poor mother performed all the last offices of affection; and in a few days the body was committed to the grave. Mr. Bernard who, meanwhile, had been obliged to return to Goodrest, came back, as he promised to do, that he might himself perform the funeral service. This was an unspeakable comfort to the *disconsolate* parents; and when all was done, he

brought them with him at once to their sad bereaved home.

Their unhappy and deluded child had indeed passed under a heavy cloud ; but they were led to hope from the encouraging words of their good pastor, that the light of grace, working a deep and sorrowful sense of sin, had beamed upon her soul, and that her offence was washed out in her Saviour's precious blood.

But who could dare trust to such a chance, or run such fearful risk ?—who presume to make sure of time and repentance being granted at their last hour ? Better indeed were it to deny our inclinations, if wrongly bent, to keep the strait and narrow way of duty, than to tread the broad easy way of (so called) pleasure, with our feet on the very brink of such a precipice.

On Mr. Bernard's return home, Miss Bentinck was anxious to know the result of his exertions, and soon went to seek him. In answer to her inquiry if poor Mary Ann had died repentant, he replied, " Yes, I truly believe so, and trusting in the only refuge of sinners ; but she has gone through a fearful time of retribution. God grant that her sorrows may have been appointed her in this world instead of the next, and that all be well for her, and for ourselves, at the last Great Day of account."

We must turn for a moment to the guilty author of all this misery. He had, of late, been little at home. Mary Ann was too often left to long solitary evenings, wondering how he employed his time, and what pleasure he could

find in being constantly from home till late hours at night. She could not but inwardly pine at his seeming to care so little for her society. Of his trade, or profession, he had always made a secret. Sometimes he would pretend that he was employed by great houses of business as a traveller, which of necessity took him away often, and for many days together; sometimes he would answer her tender reproaches as to his long evening absences, by saying, that in his business there was even more to be done by night than by day. "Never mind how or where the money comes from," he would say, "if you get all you want; and we live pretty comfortable, you must allow." But she never could feel quite easy as to his ways of making money: at times it seemed so plentiful and at others to fail so suddenly. On such occasions he did not scruple to run on credit with the tradesmen around them. He came home once or twice during that last week of her life: but no sooner did Mrs. Hastings and Mr. Bernard appear, than he kept altogether aloof. He shrunk from their presence, fearing their just reproaches,—hardened though he was. The secret of his profession soon came out;—not, however, until after her death: she was mercifully spared the knowledge of it. He was a practised gambler; and made much by overreaching unwary players. He had lately become involved in some swindling transaction, for which he was soon after brought to trial, and together with two accomplices, sentenced to *transportation*. Thus, having wilfully left the

paths of light, he had plunged deeper and deeper into the shades of sin, and we know not if the light ever again shone upon him.

CHAPTER VIII.

SACRED SEASONS.

WE turn from the tale of sorrow contained in the last chapter, to happier thoughts. As Christmas was now approaching, most of the young people, who had been confirmed in the autumn, were preparing to receive their first communion. This season, at which we celebrate the wonderful condescension of our adorable Redeemer, in taking our nature upon Him, that He might save His people from their sins, and unite them to Himself in the bonds of an everlasting covenant, must ever be a most holy, blessed time, filling our hearts with grateful love to Him,—with tenderness and goodwill towards each other. It is always a delight to faithful souls to see fresh members added, year by year, to the communion of the Church; and such was that happy Christmas at Goodrest.

The season of Epiphany coming immediately after, introduces us to the beautiful history of the wise men of the East, Gentile kings, travelling from afar, to do homage to the new-born Saviour, in His lowly estate, with their gifts of *gold, frankincense, and myrrh*. This should

naturally lead us all, as baptized Christians, to follow their example, and present our *spiritual* sacrifice, which will be no less acceptable to Him, now sitting on His throne,—as it were in gifts of gold to His poor, in the sweet-smelling incense of prayer, and in myrrh, which is the emblem of purification.

The succeeding Sundays, from Christmas to Lent, are links in the golden chain, by which the Church draws us gradually into the vale of penitence, which leads on to Calvary.

Lent is a time for increased zeal and earnestness in all our duties, as well as self-denial. Therefore, the attention of the class, in that solemn season, was more exclusively directed to Scripture reading: for Miss Bentinck was anxious to press them forward in the history of Our Lord's life and miracles, which they had been following out with the help of a Gospel Harmony; so as to be ready, during Holy Week, to study more closely the events of each day, and prepare themselves for the commemoration of His sufferings and death. For this purpose they came daily throughout that week; and it was a pleasant sight to see so many earnest young Christians, thus engaged, in making themselves acquainted with the vital truths of religion.

Greatly were their minds impressed with love to their blessed Redeemer, as they learned to realize the mental sufferings and contradiction, which He endured from sinners throughout that last sorrowful week of His sojourn on earth. How could they fail to be moved in reading the *beautiful parables*, so full of Divine mercy, as

well as of dreadful warning to the impenitent, which He pronounced in His last visits to the Temple? They were grieved that the force of divine truth with which He spake wrought no change in the hard hearts of the Scribes and Pharisees, who more than ever vexed and wearied Him with mocking questions, "hoping to catch something out of His mouth that they might accuse Him."

The Thursday's reading still more deeply interested them, as they followed the footsteps of the two disciples who were ordered to go into the city and prepare for the Last Supper, in that "large upper room," which was afterwards so endeared to the Apostles, and to the early converts, and used as the first Christian Church. "This, my children," said Miss Bentinck, "was the last memorial of the Passover feast, which for so many ages had prefigured His own sacrifice as an atonement for sin. There we behold Him, solemn and sad, knowing how soon He was to be betrayed by one of His own chosen followers, present with him at the supper-table. Then it was He said, 'With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.' At that moment too it was, that a strife arose among them, 'which of them should be accounted the greatest,'* perhaps contending who should occupy the chief seats at the table. How different the disciples from their Divine Master! for immediately He gave them a most touching example of humility, which throughout

* Luke, xxii. 24.

His whole ministry and teaching He had set forth as a chief grace of the Christian character. For the Paschal supper being ended, even though He knew that He was so soon to enter into His glory, 'He laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself; and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.' After this, having taken His garments, He sat down again with His disciples, at the supper-table. For being now about to 'depart out of this world unto the Father,' and to go whither they could not as yet follow Him,—in order that He might perfect the union which subsisted between Himself and them,—in order that they might abide in Him, and He in them,—in order that He might be with them always in a new and living way,—He instituted and ordained the Holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood, to their great and endless comfort. For He well knew how their human hearts would yearn for His presence, when they recalled to mind that form so full of majesty,—that countenance so full of mercy and love; which love He had shown so especially to themselves. Therefore, now that the hour was come, and He was to be no more in the world,—as He sat at meat with them, 'He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, Take, eat; this is my Body which is given for you.' Likewise after supper He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to *them*, saying, 'This is My Blood of the New

Testament,' assuring them that as oft as they should do this in remembrance of Him, He would verily and indeed be present with them.

"Is it not wonderful," said Miss Bentinck, "that at the very moment when He was mysteriously foreshadowing His own sufferings on the cross, for these, His disciples, and for all mankind, there should be one present, who had already sold Him for thirty pieces of silver, which was the poor price of a common slave? But alas! no depth of iniquity is too great for those to reach, who give themselves up to the power of any one sin. Such was Judas, the covetous; and, although well knowing himself to be the guilty one, he had already asked, 'Is it I?' and Jesus had replied, 'Thou hast said.' But now, after the Holy Communion, our Lord, being troubled in spirit, again declared, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you that one of you shall betray me.' 'He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it; and when He had dipped a sop He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.'"

This part of the history, which requires much attention thoroughly to understand, drew forth questions from several of the class; and Miss Bentinck had to explain at what part of the Last Supper the different circumstances occurred; this gave additional interest to the lesson. Then followed some remarks on that last farewell discourse to His beloved disciples at the supper-table, contained in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of St. John. She pointed out to them how the merciful Saviour,

forgetful of His own sorrows comforted them, "Let not your heart be troubled," He said, "ye believe in God; believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you." He assured them of their very close union with Him, "I am the true vine;" "I am the vine, ye are the branches;" and again He tells them how dear they are to Him, "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you." Surely we may say with St. Paul, "The love of Christ passeth knowledge."* She pointed out to them that one last and especial promise, which He had reserved until now, as a parting gift, namely, the promise of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, Who should be sent unto them by the Father and by Himself, to be their Spiritual Teacher; and being one with the Father and Himself, should be ever present with His redeemed people, baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity, that He might comfort, strengthen, and sanctify them.

The attention of the class was then drawn to that great prayer of intercession, which the Redeemer poured forth to His heavenly Father, not for the disciples alone, but for them also which should believe on Him through their word. "Thus," continued she, "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end," as He testified by committing them unto His Father. It is remarkable that this parting scene was concluded by His singing an hymn with the Apostles to the praise of God, even at

* Eph. iii. 19.

the moment when He was going forth to be delivered up into the hands of cruel men. But this hymn was part of the Passover ceremony, and He would leave an example to his followers of offering up praise and thanksgiving in all their religious services.

All these circumstances seemed to make a great impression on the girls, but still more that mysterious scene of Christ's agony in the garden, which we can never read without feelings of deep sorrow and awe. When He with His disciples had sung an hymn, they went out of the upper room, passed through the city gate, which led to the valley of Jehoshaphat; then crossing the bridge over the brook Kedron, they came to the garden of Gethsemane on the other side, at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Our Lord had often resorted thither during His visits to Jerusalem; there, perhaps, he often prayed. Now, he truly had need to pray; for the feelings of His Humanity began to exercise an agonising influence over Him. Although He was the Son of God—nay, very God of very God—He was no less the second Adam in the flesh, and as such in His Humanity He shrunk with dread at the approach of His crucifixion. He knew that Judas was lying in wait to deliver Him up to the priests. He saw beforehand His condemnation, His scourgings, the desolations and terrible hours of the Cross, and the feelings of man's nature sunk under the prospect. He had taken Peter, James, and John with Him into the garden; but He withdrew Himself *to a little distance to pray.* All human words

are feeble to describe the scene of our Lord's agony; therefore the readings of the class gave only the words of the Evangelists, setting forth the Saviour's prayer, three times repeated; and "He went a little further and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." "His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death." "And there appeared an angel from Heaven strengthening Him."* His anguish had been such that "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." We can only imagine, in a very faint degree, what must have been the mental agony of the all-holy Saviour at the apparent withdrawal of His Heavenly Father's love; for had not His whole desire ever been "to do His will?" This was the fore-casting of that mighty cloud of sorrow, when on the Cross He cried with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" *All that* He bore for us, that we might be reconciled to our offended God!

Of the scenes of Friday (rightly called Good Friday, by reason of its blessings so dearly won for us), who can duly speak? It is best to keep silence and adore,—to commune with our own hearts in our chamber, and be still,—to bow down in spirit beneath His cross, remembering with tears of sorrow and true repentance our many, many sins, by which we all have borne our part in causing the necessity of His cruci-

* Luke xxii. 43, 44.

fixion for the redemption of the world. Thus, and thus only, shall we made partakers of His all-sufficient atonement,—thus, and thus only, can we be sprinkled with His precious blood, which cleanseth from all sin.

Some such remarks were made to the class by Miss Bentinck on the Thursday evening; she also told them, that as the services of Good Friday would contain the full account of their blessed Saviour's sufferings, during those three hours of darkness from twelve to three, whereby was completed the great sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, she should not expect to see them till the Saturday.

When they met again on Easter eve, their grave, quiet looks showed that the services of Good Friday, and, indeed, the thoughts of this whole season, had sunk deeply into their hearts. After the short prayer which was always offered up before they began to read, an urgent request was made by most of them to be allowed to sing the beautiful hymn for Easter eve. "That one Mr. Bernard is so fond of, ma'am," said they. "Most likely he will choose it for this evening's service; he generally does on Easter eve." Miss Bentinck well knew which hymn they meant (for it was as great a favourite of her own), and gladly consented.

"I am always pleased," said she, "to go over these things in spirit beforehand; it helps us to enter into them with more devotion when the time comes: and if we would thus ever keep ourselves prepared for the services of the Church, *we should be more like the holy psalmist*

David, who said, 'praise shall be ever in my mouth.'

Accordingly they sung that well-known beautiful hymn, to its own solemn and appropriate tune,—

"All is o'er, the pain, the sorrow,
Human taunts and Satan's spite;
Death shall be despoil'd to-morrow
Of the prey he grasps to-night:
Yet once more, to seal his doom,
Christ must sleep within the tomb.

"Fierce and deadly was the anguish
Which on yonder cross He bore;
How did soul and body languish,
Till the toil of death was o'er!
But that toil, so fierce and dread
Bruis'd and crush'd the serpent's head.

"Close and still the cell that holds Him,
While in brief repose He lies;
Deep the slumber that enfolds Him,
Veil'd awhile from mortal eyes,—
Slumber such as needs must be
After hard-won victory.

"All night long with plaintive voicing
Chant His requiem soft and low;
Loftier strains of loud rejoicing
From to-morrow's harps shall flow;
Death and Hell at length are slain:
Christ has triumph'd; Christ doth reign."

The reading which followed was suitable to the day;—the sorrow of the disciples, the faithful patient watching of the Maries at the *sepulchre* of the Lord, whom they loved so well.

and to whom they had ministered of their substance in His journeys through Galilee,*—the vain thought of His enemies, sealing the stone and setting a watch, in the belief that His disciples would “come by night and steal Him away,”—were subjects of deep interest. Also the preparations of the loving women to anoint the sacred body with spices, little knowing that the glorious resurrection would restore to them their lost Lord,—all these were shortly explained to the class, who listened with fixed attention.

As Miss Bentinck closed the book, she said, “I hope, my dear girls, you will not only bear these things in mind for to-day, but let them often form the subject of your meditations. On Fridays especially we should recall to mind our Saviour’s passion; and on Saturdays, some quiet thoughts of that mysterious time, when Christ’s body lay in the sepulchre, would always form a good preparation for Sunday, which, in a certain sense, is ‘an Easter Day in every week,’—lifting us up to the glory of His resurrection, and making it a day of holy joy.

Miss Bentinck was much pleased with the interest which her young scholars expressed in regard to those forty days before the risen Saviour’s Ascension into Heaven. In answer to their enquiries, she explained to them that they are to be observed, in remembrance of the Lord’s mysterious sojourn, during that number of days, upon earth, sometimes appearing suddenly to

* Luke viii. 2, 3.

His apostles, but at others withdrawn from them, they knew not whither,—until in His own time, He ascended again into Heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God, where He now reigns in “the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.”

Seeing that these remarks had not wearied her young pupils, she thus continued, “Above all, I would have you remember that you are *each* solemnly engaged to the service of God, to be His loving and obedient children, ‘bought with a price,’ being no less than the precious Blood of His Own dear Son, which was shed for you and for me, and for all other sinners, that as we have each one offended, so each by real heart-felt repentance, may be reconciled to Him, as to a loving father, and then He will take us under His care, and bring us safe to His kingdom of Heaven. These thoughts will keep us in a humble frame of mind, for we could never have deserved or gained such blessings for ourselves: thus amid our Easter joy we shall never forget the new covenant or agreement to which we have all been pledged in our Baptism and Confirmation, namely, to love, to fear, and to obey Him;—this covenant you will, most of you, renew to-morrow in the blessed Sacrament. I have thought much of you throughout this season, never ceasing to pray that you might grow in grace, and become steadfast Christians, and happy in yourselves,—to the joy of all who love you. Such of you as received your first Communion at Christmas, were thereby dedicated to a new *and higher* life; and I hope you have been

striving to live as true members of Christ. If you were made such at your Baptism, you became so in a still higher sense in that Holy Sacrament, which is the nearest approach to Him you can have on earth. Indeed, to the faithful it is the very Presence of Christ within, and I may almost say, a blessed foretaste of Heaven.

“For this greatest of our Christian privileges we ought always to be living in a state of preparation, which does not consist so much in the length of time we devote to it, as in giving our *whole mind* to make the best use of *such time* as we have. It may be quite as *earnest* when we have but *little* time, as when we have more; but after all, our *daily life* and the way in which we do our *daily duties* is the truest test of our being really fit to draw near. If a person’s aim is to serve God in all things, this will make the busiest life as acceptable to Him, and as profitable to the soul, as that of one who has more leisure for prayer and holy reading. The commonest duties performed in such a spirit will be occasions of lifting up our thoughts on high, and become a sacrifice well-pleasing unto God. Suppose some of you, as servants, were thus to go through your daily business, ‘not with eye-service as men-pleasers,’ but ‘as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,’ you would, by endeavouring thus to live to Him, be better prepared for a near approach to His Divine Presence in sacred services, than a person who might have opportunity for many prayers, and lengthened prepa-

ration, but a less steady aim to God's glory in lowly acts of duty. A habit of considering Christ as our great example in all things will soon make such little sacrifices easy—nay sweet. If we really love Him, and think how great was His love for us, we shall find His yoke easy, and His burden light."

"I'm afraid," said Rose, "I am not always willing to make such little sacrifices, but I will try this way of becoming so."

"Yes, do," answered Miss Bentinck; "you will soon find it easy, and at this sacred season especially we may well learn more willingly to take up our Cross (whatever it may be), and follow our dear Saviour, Lord, and Master, who bore for us so much more than we can ever bear for Him. If (as I believe) you have followed Him with loving hearts throughout this time when He endured such 'extreme anguish' for our sakes, you will be willing to 'follow on,' and bear your daily cross after Him all your lives. But it is getting late, our Easter-eve is well-nigh spent; we will speak no more of the suffering. To-morrow we shall meet in joy, to celebrate together the glorious Resurrection, and partake together of that Heavenly Feast, wherein we are made "very members incorporate in the mystical body of Christ," united most closely to Him, and to one another in Him.

This was understood as a signal for departure, and the girls rose to go.

Scarcely had the little group dispersed when a knock was heard at the door. "Come in," said *Miss Bentinck*: and Clara entered. They had

not met for some time. Clara was evidently well pleased to come, and gladly took Miss Bentinck's offered hand; but seemed a little uneasy, and doubtful how to enter upon some subject which was uppermost in her mind.

"Well, Clara," began Miss Bentinck, (wishing to set her more at ease,) "how have you been going on lately?"

"Pretty well, thank you, ma'am,—at least all are well at home, I am thankful to say. But," added she, hesitating, "I'm afraid I have not been going on very well in myself."

"Indeed, I am sorry to hear that; what has been amiss?"

"Why, ma'am, somehow I can't help feeling restless and unhappy at times; there has been rather a weight on my mind ever since I gave up coming to the class; for although one reason for doing so was, that Mother could not well spare me to come any longer, I have felt very sorry since for the way in which I spoke to you about it, and meant to have asked your pardon before now."

"I quite forgive you, Clara; indeed I had done so long ago: but I am glad for your own sake that you have seen your fault, and are willing to acknowledge it."

"Yes, ma'am, it certainly was both silly and ungrateful to speak as I did; and I have made it worse by being so slow to express my regret for it. I have many times intended to do so before now, but something or other has always happened to hinder me."

"That is too often the case, when once we

begin to delay. If we miss opportunities, they do not always occur again. However, in this instance, I take the will for the deed, and shall think no more of it."

"It is very kind of you, ma'am, and just what I hoped for; but this is not all I had to say. My mind has been ill at ease for some time past on other points. And this makes me feel the need of some such friend as you to advise me."

"Have you ever spoken to Mr. Bernard of your difficulties? You know he is always glad to help any who come to him."

"No, ma'am, I never have. He is very willing and kind, I know: indeed we had a sermon from him the Sunday before last, in which he quoted that passage from the Exhortation in the Communion Service, which bids any 'who are troubled in mind, and cannot quiet their own conscience,' to come to their minister 'and open their grief.' But I felt as if I could not tell him of such silly trifles as those which trouble me, and that I could much more comfortably speak to you."

"But, my dear child, that is not at all the same thing; for, though I might perhaps help you a little, he could do so infinitely more. I am full of infirmities myself. Besides, he, as an appointed minister of God, is 'endued with power from on High,' whence alone effectual help can be given to us. You need not fear to tell him about what you call trifles. His advice would be a great help to you, and he would not consider anything a trifle which troubles you, or *keeps you from growing in grace.*"

"Well, ma'am, if you think so, I will go at once, and see if I can find him at home."

Thus they parted, Miss Bentinck rejoicing in Clara's decision.

Easter-day was a very bright and happy one. The glorious sun-rise was to all the faithful, rising early on that blessed morn, a fit emblem of the "Sun of Righteousness," Who did indeed arise from the darkness of the grave, shedding abroad His glorious rays,—grace, salvation, and holiness. Well might all say and feel,

"The Eastern Sun
Shines glorious o'er yon open grave;
And to and fro the tidings run,
Who died to heal is risen to save."

Calm and blessed was the hour of early morning Communion at Goodrest. Joyful, but solemn was the thought, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." The thought of past suffering was well-nigh lost in that of the Lord's triumphant Resurrection, and the victory over death. Well may the feast be kept, "not with the old leaven," &c., but with the "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," with thankfulness to the "Author and Giver of a new and risen life in Christ," and with charity and goodwill to one another.

Many a young heart came forth from the Church's holy aisle better strengthened for their Christian course than they had ever been before; while older members of the congregation felt (as faithful souls must always feel at each return of this great festival) that it was one of the most joyful days in the whole year; and such it truly *was in Goodrest.*

Easter Monday and Tuesday, being almost universal holidays, set many of the young ones free from their usual work. Mr. Bernard had been much pleased with their earnest endeavour to do right, and was bent upon proposing to them some little scheme of pleasure; accordingly, when they gathered round him on Sunday afternoon to receive fresh books from the book-club, he proposed to take them for a walk with him to a neighbouring village, where he had some business to arrange, and where there was a beautiful wood, well known for its abundance of flowers,—blue-bells, primroses, and above all, lilies of the valley. “Oh! that will be delightful! The wood; the wood!” resounded on all sides.

“And please, sir, may we take some spades and dig up roots for our gardens?”

“Oh, certainly,” said Mr. Bernard; “I want some too, for my garden. I dare say Richardson will lend us his little donkey-cart, to bring home our plants and spades.”

The plan was soon settled, an early hour in the afternoon of next day being appointed. Miss Bentinck and her sisters were well pleased to join the expedition also; and by two o'clock they were all ready to make a start. The day smiled upon them; they had a delightful walk, whilst he told them of many interesting things by the way, relating little anecdotes of natural history, and pointing out many wonderful things in the beauty of God's works, which had never struck them before.

When they came to the entrance of the wood,

Mr. Bernard went a little way in with them, giving them directions where they would find the best plants, whilst he went for a while to see the Rector of the parish, and promising to come back to them as soon as possible. They were all glad when he joined them in less than an hour: meanwhile they had been digging away to their hearts' content, and had provided a goodly number of roots for Mr. Bernard's garden, before they thought of themselves. He soon repaid them with interest; for with his strong hand he was not long in digging up roots enough for all, which were carefully stowed away in the little cart. On their way home Mr. Bernard told them a story,—“a true story,” which they were all very fond of, having heard many a one before from him. This beguiled the length of the way, so that no one thought of fatigue until they reached Goodrest. It was a pretty sight, as they passed through the village towards evening, to see the groups of labourers resting after their day's work,—fathers sitting by their cottage doors, with their children playing round them, and here and there a little one sitting on their knees; mothers busy within preparing the evening meal; some few of the men or elder boys making another hour's work to cultivate their little plot of ground. None failed to salute Mr. Bernard as he passed, with a reverence which showed how highly he was esteemed among them. “Ah!” said Mr. Bernard, as they passed from the village towards the common, “what a little Paradise this earth might be, if only people knew how to make it so, by

striving for the kingdom of God and His righteousness, as they do for their daily bread."

A few more minutes' walk brought them to the Rectory, where they found a nice tea kindly provided for them, and where they passed the remainder of the evening very pleasantly. Miss Bentinck had rejoiced to observe throughout the day how completely the anxious look had passed away from Clara's brow, and that she seemed now as happy and as much at ease in herself as the rest; and on taking leave, Clara gratefully pressed her hand, as if to thank her for putting her in the right way for obtaining it.

CHAPTER IX.

PROGRESS.

WE must now pass by two or three years in the history of our young friends, and tell of some changes which were taking place among them. Several of them had by this time left the class; and, although Miss Bentinck was sorry to lose them, she felt that the elder ones must by degrees pass out, and thus make room for younger ones, who were from time to time seeking admission.

Margaret had been, as hitherto, steady and consistent, and was now training for a higher sphere of usefulness. The clergyman of the district, where her little school was held, having often

come in to watch the progress of the children, was much pleased with her method, as also with her quiet and patient manner towards them. He was anxious to get good schools established in his parish ; but they had yet to be built : and thinking, that by the time they were finished, Margaret might be fitted to become the mistress of the girls' school, he had mentioned this plan to Mr. Bernard, who willingly furthered it by placing her under his own National-school mistress for evening instruction. Margaret herself was highly delighted, as may well be supposed : some months afterwards, she entered upon her charge ; and being thus enabled to provide a more comfortable home for her mother, as well as in great measure to support her by her own exertions, she was truly happy and thankful.

Ellen and Harriett had continued to improve greatly. They had seen the folly and vanity of smart dress, and had for some time past steadily followed Miss Bentinck's advice, and saved their money for better purposes. This had been placed in the Savings' Bank, and formed a little fund which enabled them to procure many comforts for their parents, who were now in advancing years ; and they found far more satisfaction in this, than in spending it, as formerly, upon themselves.

Susan, who it will be remembered, had formerly been a subject of anxiety to her kind teacher, had of late improved greatly, and was now a cause of rejoicing to her. She had felt thoroughly ashamed of herself, and of her careless ways, which had caused her to be put

back from Confirmation ; and, having once found courage to beg for re-admission into the class, she was determined to profit by it ; and thenceforth gave her whole mind both to learning diligently, and to correcting herself of her bad habits. She had now become as remarkable for punctuality and personal tidiness as she had formerly been for irregularity and slatternly ways. Mr. Bernard was quite as much pleased with the change in Susan as Miss Bentinck, and held out to her the hope of being much better fitted for the next Confirmation, which was expected to take place in the following spring, and to which she now looked forward as a real blessing.

Of Janet, Sarah, and Ann, it will be sufficient to say that they had been making fair progress in their learning, and in the improvement of their tempers and disposition. Being nearly of an age, they clung much together, and this proved of great benefit to them ; for each saw in the others some qualities which were wanting in herself : thus they were moved to watch against their own particular failings. Miss Bentinck had always, as much as possible, spoken in private to any girl whom she found it necessary to reprove. She had thus remarked to Janet on her forwardness, and recommended her to copy Sarah's quiet, gentle behaviour ; and, on the other hand, had secretly stirred up Sarah to imitate Janet's quickness and diligence at her lessons. Ann was both quiet and diligent ; and her invariable good *humour* was a constant reminder to both the

others, when the natural difference of their dispositions would have led to quarrels.

Mary and Rose were also great friends ; they too were much of an age—older than the three last mentioned (for our readers will remember that they were among those admitted to Confirmation), and were now regular communicants. Rose had missed Margaret greatly when she first moved away to the next village ; but she managed to see her sometimes on Sunday, and she did not forget her good example and advice. Margaret had above all urged her at parting not to neglect the blessing of frequent communion, now that she was privileged to partake of it ; assuring her that she would find it such a stay to her soul as nothing else could be, and that she would gain thereby strength to perform her daily duties in a right spirit, and resist temptation. Rose found the truth of her friend's words, and was careful to use the strength thus given her ; so that the favourable change in her disposition and conduct was remarked by all. Her mother would sometimes say, "I never saw a girl so much changed for the better; for, however the little ones may tease, she never gives them a cross word now, or a slap, as she used a while ago." And the children themselves would say, "Rose is a dear good'un now ; she don't scold and push us about as she used to." Mary had also found the blessing of that strength from on High, which alone can enable us to fulfil our duties aright, and lived consistently and happily in her humble station. Her mistress was very *kind to her*, and had reason to be so ; for she found

her a steady and useful little servant, attentive to her lodgers, and good-natured to the children.

One Sunday afternoon, as Mary and Rose, who generally went to church together, were returning home, they were overtaken by a heavy thunderstorm; and were invited by Miss Bentinck to take shelter in her house. To make the time pass pleasantly, she showed them some beautiful prints. One especially attracted their attention. The subject was Christ standing at the door knocking.

"Oh, ma'am, how beautiful!" exclaimed both at once. "That must be drawn from the text, 'Behold I stand at the door and knock.'"

"Yes," answered Miss Bentinck; "you see that text is printed underneath."

"I never felt that I quite understood that text, ma'am," said Mary. "What is meant by the door?"

"It must mean the door of our hearts; for the text continues, 'if any man hear My Voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.' This may be understood as applying to any call of the Lord,—but more especially to the time of Holy Communion, as we cannot doubt from the words which follow, 'and sup with him, and he with Me.' We may well be amazed at such condescension; for does not this refer to Christ's Presence within the soul in Holy Communion, of which He himself speaks thus, 'He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him?'"* Hence our Church in her

* John vi. 56.

exhortation to the assembled communicants, as it were takes up and explains His words, and clearly teaches them the 'great benefit' (or blessing) which they are about to receive, saying, 'for *then* we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink His blood; *then* we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we *are one* with Christ, and *Christ* with us.' Well may we pray Him, 'Abide with us;'^{*} and learn, like Mary, to sit at His feet, to hear His words, and do His bidding in all things. Well were it for us, if we could always remember His Presence with us, keeping His commandments, and abiding in His love."

"I wish we could," said Rose; "but how soon things arise to turn away our minds from Him, and our very hearts too, sometimes by a mere trifle."

"Yes, unhappily it is so; but if we watch against these distractions, and strive to see Him still by faith, in the midst of whatever we may have to do, praying for grace to do it as to Him, we shall be enabled to obtain a fuller sense of His Divine Presence, and of our true union with Him. Much depends on our own will, and the earnestness with which we use the means of grace, especially in Holy Communion. It is greatly in our own power to retain the benefits therein conveyed to us, by careful recollectedness of behaviour, both at the time of receiving and afterwards, as I have before now said to you all; for just think what is your conduct when a friend comes to visit you. If he is

^{*} Luke xxiv. 29.

one whom you love very dearly, you not only receive him with joy, and do him all possible honour; but you watch his every look, listen attentively to his every word, and strive to keep him with you as long as possible. Still more so if he were one high in rank, eminent for all good and noble qualities. Now, all these being combined in an unspeakably higher degree in our blessed Saviour, *how much* rather should we strive to honour and love Him, for His great condescension in thus coming to visit us, pray Him to abide with us, and on our part abide in Him,* striving to do all things to His Glory, as our rightful King;

‘Where Jesus comes, He comes to reign.’

“At times of Holy Communion, as indeed of ordinary prayer, we should bear in mind that we approach the very steps of His Throne, and give up all our thoughts entirely to Him. And even when we return to our ordinary duties, why should we ever lose sight of Him? He is still with us, if we are with Him in heart and mind. Then assuredly His Divine grace will strengthen us in our Christian course, and enable us to bring forth fruits of righteousness to eternal life.”

The weather having now cleared, the girls thanked Miss Bentinck for her kindness, wished her good evening, and made the best of their way home.

* John xv. 4.

CHAPTER X.

THE SETTLERS.

It was now summer. All nature was in full beauty. During the spring there had been a succession of genial showers, which had tempered the soil to an unusually fruitful state, so that the meadows were clothed with a rich green, most refreshing to the eye; and the corn-fields, gardens, and orchards gave promise of a plentiful season. Goodrest was in summer a most delightful place; for, independent of the general fertility and loveliness of the season, that favoured spot abounded in fine old trees,—oaks and elms,—and especially about the church, whose light grey spire, pointing upwards, stood out in bright contrast with their venerable trunks and dark foliage, which afforded a refreshing shade from the sun's heat.

In the glorious summer-time all hearts expand with joy and gratitude; it seems to call forth every happy, kindly feeling. If Easter is the spring-tide of hope, Trinity-tide may be called the emblem of completeness: so likewise the bright glowing weather, which follows in its train, may represent to our minds the warmth and blessedness of Divine love, reigning within the Christian soul. In this holy season all earnest Christians may well rejoice in the abundant means of grace stored up for them in the

Church, by the due use of which they may be more and more "filled with all the fulness of God."* To such, the sense of His Presence within and around them, is a perpetual sunshine, as well as a real stay and strength.

This year had been a very happy one to Miss Bentinck. Not only was her mind relieved of some anxieties which had of late been pressing upon her, arising from illness among friends and relations; but also she was now beginning to see the fruit of her labours in the progress of her scholars.

An event occurred about this time, which was one of great interest to her,—indeed to them all,—as it showed forth in a satisfactory way the effects of good training.

It was just such a season as all farmers rejoice in. Our old friend Watson, among others, was early and late in the fields with his men, overlooking all things himself, for he used to say that it was "a shame to let God's gifts be wasted for want of making the most of time and opportunity." He would often relate what he had once seen in Ireland, which had much grieved him,—fine crops standing in the field, actually bound in sheaves, yet left to rot, through very laziness of those who should have gathered them in, and who in consequence would be well-nigh reduced to famine, as winter came on.

One evening as he was returning home from a long day's work, lifting up his thoughts in thankfulness to the great Giver of all good, he

* Eph. iii. 19.

saw some one approaching with a brisk step to meet him. He was a fine robust young man, with something in his whole manner which bespoke an active, cheerful disposition, while his healthy sun-burnt face gave token of industrious habits, and exposure to the weather. On approaching Watson he respectfully raised his hat; but seeing that he did not know him, he said, "I don't wonder, sir, at your having forgotten me, for we never met but once before, and that was long ago. But I have ever since well remembered the day, for some good advice which you then gave me; and have often wished for an opportunity of thanking you for it."

These words, together with something in the expression of his eye, and the tone of his voice, awakened some faint idea in Watson's mind of who he might be. He said wonderingly, looking him steadily in the face, "Why, sure you must be that young friend of Tom Winks's, whom I saw at the fair, some years ago?"

"Yes," answered Ned,—for it was he (looking a little ashamed at the remembrance of the past), "and sorry I was that I ever chose such friends; but from that very hour I turned from their company. Your words, and, that scene, made a deep impression upon me. I humbly thank God, Who sent me such a lesson, and a kind friend in you to press it home to my conscience. By His grace I have been enabled to keep true to the resolutions I then formed. He has blessed me in all my ways."

"Spoken like a man," answered Watson, "and a good Christian too. Give me your hand,

young friend ; I'm right glad to see you again and thankful that any words of mine should have helped you forward to a better course."

As they proceeded along the lane and across the fields, through which lay the path towards the farm-house, Watson asked him many questions as to his adventures of late years, his mode of life, and present employment. In answer to these, Edward Merton told him that he had found it difficult, on returning home, to make up his mind how he could best break off from his idle ways and companions. He made enquiries in every likely quarter for a situation as clerk, or some other regular employment ; but he found that so much more was required in the way of penmanship, and readiness at figures, than he had given himself the trouble to learn, that all his endeavours failed. This was greatly the grief of his parents, who, in proportion to their joy at the favourable change in his disposition, were dejected at the difficulties which thus arose in the way of carrying out his good resolutions. His father held a small farm, which made just sufficient return to keep himself and his wife in respectability and tolerable comfort, but not to support his son in idleness : nor indeed, could he afford any help towards settling him forward in business. Edward himself, notwithstanding that new and better convictions had dawned upon him, had become very unwilling to remain any longer at home, a burden to them. He therefore set himself in good earnest to seek for employment. This good resolve at last met *with success*, and it came to him in an unexpected

pected way. He went one day to a friend of his father's in London, hoping to hear of some situation, and even indulging the thought of obtaining a trial in this friend's own house of business. He pleaded his cause with much earnestness, representing his parents' advanced years, and his own anxiety to help them by his exertions: but he found little sympathy from the cold man of business, who only looked upon him as a lad "not up to his mark." Edward was turning away in disappointment, when his eye met that of a gentleman, who had entered the counting-house unobserved, and had listened with greater interest to his earnest pleading than his so-called friend.

"Young man," he said, "if you want an honest employment, I think I may be able to help you, provided you are ready to enter upon it immediately, and are not afraid of work. If you will call on me this evening, I will tell you further what will be expected of you." So saying, he gave him his address.

The result of the interview was one of mutual satisfaction. Mr. King (for that was the gentleman's name) was in want of an active, enterprising youth to accompany him immediately to Australia, where he had extensive property. He had returned to this country to settle some affairs, and required a young assistant to act as travelling inspector of his sheep-walks, and land in the interior of the country. Of such matters Edward was a tolerable judge, having been accustomed to farming all his life, *though perhaps not so efficient a help to his*

father as he might, and ought to have been. Mr. King at once took a favourable impression of Edward, seeing his anxiety to obtain employment for the sake of his parents; indeed, there were strong marks of candour and intelligence in his looks, which promised well for his purpose.

Edward, on his part, was no less pleased with his new and generous friend. He felt a natural pang at the thought of leaving all most dear to him so suddenly, and, perhaps, for many years; but it seemed a providential opening for him, which, to a youthful mind, seemed full of hope and interest. He therefore at once accepted the offer, with many expressions of gratitude. The old people were somewhat startled by the announcement, that he had thus engaged himself to sail in a fortnight's time to the other end of the world; but they also saw at once the advantage it would be to him; and felt sure that they could now trust him to be steady, wherever he might go. His mother consoled herself by making all necessary preparations for his comfortable outfit, for which Mr. King kindly made the requisite advance. The parting was a sad one; but they commended him, with earnest prayers, to His Heavenly Father's care: and he set sail full of hope, and with a good heart.

All this Edward related to Watson, and gave him many details, interesting to a farmer, of the management of land and sheep in those distant parts of the world.

"It is wonderful," he said, "what fortunes *are sometimes* made by those who are content to

live out yonder for ten or twelve years, which my master strongly urged me to do. He has made his fortune there, and I might have done the same by remaining longer; but five years are enough to be banished from one's native land, and as I've saved sufficient to give my father and mother some comfort in their old age, I'd rather, for my part, live in a snug little cottage in dear old England, than possess a palace in any other country.

Thus talking they reached the farm-house, where Watson made him welcome. He had need of a fresh introduction to Mrs. Watson and Clara, neither of whom remembered him; nor was this to be wondered at, having only seen him once before, at the fair. Mrs. Watson, however, was always ready to welcome any one brought home by her husband, for she was a good and obliging wife, and had full reliance on his judgment. A pleasant and cheerful evening they spent over the supper-table. The young traveller had many interesting adventures to relate, and strange tales to tell of foreign countries; so that it was a late hour ere the friendly party broke up. Watson then, looking at his watch, reminded Edward that he had a good step to go to the little village inn, where he was to take up his quarters for the night.

"You had better come and breakfast with us to-morrow morning, lad," said he, at parting; "I should like to show you over my lands and farming stock; you shall then tell me whether your Australian pastures are better than ours."

"Thank you, sir," answered Edward; "I

shall be right glad to accompany you ; and I'll be bound to say I shall vote for Old England."

"A fine young fellow that !" said Watson, as he came back from the gate, to which he had accompanied him, and settled himself again in his arm-chair ; he seems to have gained much steadiness and experience these last few years, and yet lost none of his English heart and feeling abroad."

"I'm sure he must have a good heart," said Mrs. Watson, "to have given up the opportunity of becoming a rich man there, lest he should outstay his parents' life, and never see them again."

"Yes," added Clara ; "did you see the tears standing in his eyes when he spoke of his mother's last letter, in which she told him that she was very ill, and feared she should not live to see him again ?"

"Aye," said Watson ; "and he told me it was that letter which had decided him against accepting Mr. King's handsome offer of house and grounds, if he would remain. But I haven't yet told you how he took such a good turn. I've reason to be thankful for what little share I had in it." He then related what had passed between them when they first met that afternoon, and Edward's thanks for the advice by which he had so well profited. Mrs. Watson and Clara were much interested, and well prepared by what they had now heard to receive him next morning with friendly greetings.

Watson liked, more and more, what he saw of *his young friend*, showed him all his farm, and

was much pleased at his still retaining a hearty admiration of good old English ways. Watson, during their conversations, entered also with interest into Edward's affairs, asking him what line he now meant to take, and advising him in various ways. Edward readily opened his mind to him, and told him that he had laid by a tolerable sum, sufficient to set him up in some business, and enable him to make an honest livelihood ; but that his present intention was to remain at home, and help his father in managing his little farm.

"Aye, lad, that's best," said Watson, well pleased to see his young friend's mind disposed towards his own line of life ; "depend upon it, that's best for you all : and I'll be bound by the time you've spent a year in it, you'll be stamped a farmer for life."

Edward went home the next day. His father was earnestly wishing for his return, that he might consult him about many little new arrangements ; for he knew and rejoiced in Edward's determination to remain at home, and join him in the business of the farm. He now settled steadily to this work, and was a real help, especially in the knowledge he had acquired of the management of sheep. Everton farm was only a few miles from Goodrest, and Watson would sometimes steal an hour or two, when not too busy, to see how his young friend was getting on. It was no less pleasure to Edward to go occasionally in his leisure hours to Goodrest farm, where he was always welcome. *Things had gone on thus for nearly a year, till*

one day, as Edward was on his way thither, he met Watson, who seemed in more than usual spirits. "Why, lad," said he, "I was just coming to see you; I've a piece of good news for you. I have just seen Squire Brixham (who lives, as you may know, two miles beyond us), and he asked me if I could recommend any steady respectable person with a good knowledge of farming, fit to be put in charge of his estate. I at once thought of you, and mentioned your name to him; for although, perhaps, you are full young for a situation of such responsibility, you have had a good deal of experience in that sort of work for one of your age; and you have improved so much in all points of practical farming, under my eye, (added he, with a sly approving wink) to say nothing of your father's, that I really think you might suit. I'll walk over there with you to-morrow morning, and we shall soon see how the matter is likely to go."

Edward thanked him warmly, and promised to be at Goodrest early next morning. But, however favourable this opening might seem to others, Edward was much divided in his mind about it. He well knew that his loss would be greatly felt at home; and it seemed hard to leave, just as he was becoming so useful—indeed almost essential to his father. This doubt he stated to Watson, on their way to Brixham.

"I don't see that it need be a separation," answered he; "because, when you are once fairly *settled*, they could come and join you. Your *father is almost past work*, and his little farm

at Everton is not a very profitable concern, though I must say you've made the best of it. You would be able at Brixham to offer them such a home as would secure the comfort of their latter days; for you would all be free from the anxiety and uncertainty of farming on your own account. Squire Brixham, who is a liberal-hearted man, offers a handsome salary."

"Well," answered Edward, "it would, indeed, be a happiness to me to bring them to such a home; and also to come and settle so near to you: but before I can make up my mind to do so, I must frankly tell you something, which, perhaps, I ought to have named to you sooner, but *could not*."

"What is it, then?" asked Watson, somewhat surprised, and turning rather anxiously towards Edward.

"Why, sir, I feel that if, after all your kindness, anything should ever cause a coolness between us, it is more than I could bear to stay in the neighbourhood."

"Well, you're a strange fellow!" answered Watson; "what can have put such a thought into your head?"

"It is said that friendships quickly formed may quickly change."

"I can't think what you mean! Pray throw a little light upon your words; for I'm quite in the dark."

"Then, sir, to come to the point at once, I will tell you frankly, that I had another reason for seeking you out so soon after my return to England. I had carried the remembrance of

your daughter with me to foreign lands, having been much struck with her quiet yet cheerful manners, and pleasant looks ; and I feel as if I should have no heart to settle down so near you without some encouragement to hope, that you approve my feelings towards her."

Watson stood still, surprised, but pleased. The idea had never struck him till that moment. He was somewhat startled by the suddenness of the disclosure ; but, as a father, he could only rejoice at this feeling towards his daughter in one of whom he had so good an opinion.

"Well !" said he, after a little consideration, "I have every reason to think well of you, Edward ; but we must see what Clara's own feeling is in so important a matter. I am not for letting young people 'marry in a hurry and repent at leisure ;' but I consider you worthy of her. Clara must, of course, judge for herself ; and if we find she is in the same mind towards you, depend upon it, her mother and I will not stand in the way of your happiness. If you succeed in obtaining this situation, you will have as comfortable a home to offer her as we could desire."

Edward grasped his hand ; his grateful looks expressed what his full heart would not allow him to utter.

Thus talking they arrived at Brixham, and entered the park-gates. It was a fine property, and the house itself a stately-looking, old-fashioned place, with a long avenue of fine *trees leading to it*, which bespoke its antiquity ; *their shade was very refreshing to Watson and*

his companion ; and although the subject of their exciting conversation was uppermost in Edward's thoughts, he had quite regained his composure before he was introduced to Mr. Brixham.

The Squire was an elderly gentleman : he took a lively interest in all the details of his estate ; but he could no longer so actively superintend it in person, and was anxious to secure the services of a bailiff whom he could thoroughly trust. He knew Watson well, and respected him highly ; therefore he lent a willing ear to his recommendation of Edward Merton ; indeed he felt interested in his story, which Watson had taken care to tell him in their conversation on the previous day, adding many favourable remarks, both on his good character, and the experience he had gained. Thus Mr. Brixham was already prepossessed in his favour : having asked to see his testimonials from Mr. King, he expressed himself well satisfied with the high praise bestowed on his abilities, his thorough knowledge of all farming management, and his clear business-like ways. It was evident from the whole tone of his letters, that he not only placed entire confidence in him, but also took a lively interest in his welfare.

Mr. King having a brother in London, to whom Edward had references, Mr. Brixham made enquiries of him, and being perfectly satisfied with the answers he received, it was soon agreed between them, that Edward should make arrangements for settling himself as soon as possible at Brixham Farm.

The summer was passing quickly away, the

crops were all got in, Edward having carefully watched over everything himself. There was, indeed, great need of doing so ; for the former bailiff being a careless, slovenly man, had let the granaries and farm-buildings get into very bad condition, so that many repairs were needed. Edward had not long been in his place before every one perceived that nothing could escape his watchful eye, and that no neglect or dishonesty would be suffered. Nevertheless, he gained the good-will of all who had to work under him by his willingness to take his fair share of labour, and by the friendly interest which he showed for their families as well as themselves, especially if they were suffering from any illness or accident : he never failed to bring such cases under Mr. Brixham's notice, and was thus the means of securing for them the relief which they required. This thoughtful kindness also raised him in the esteem of his master, who was in every way well satisfied with him.

The squire was a thorough good old English gentleman, delighting to see all around him happy. He always held a grand feast at harvest-home, when he presided at the head of the table ; Edward being appointed to the charge of the other end, and allowed to invite a few friends. It need hardly be said that the inhabitants of the farm at Goodrest were of this number : indeed there were but few others whom he cared to ask ; for although he was neighbourly to all *around, and universally liked and respected, he had formed no other special intimacies.*

His visits *there* were as frequent as his many occupations would allow ; seldom did many days slip by without his making time for an evening chat : or if by chance a whole week should pass without his being able to do so, Sunday evening was sure to find him there.

Edward now felt that the time was come for him to open his mind to Clara ; he had a good hope that she felt a real regard for him : yet she always seemed rather shy, when he was there ; and he could not help sometimes having a mis-giving, which only the more urged him to speak without further delay. Accordingly, now that the great business of harvesting was over, he went to meet Watson at the usual hour of his return home, and told him, that having now a comfortable home to offer his daughter, he was come to claim his promise, and make his proposal to Clara. " You have been like a second father to me all along," said Edward ; " and if she will but consent, I trust you will never find me other than a dutiful son : and I can promise that she shall find me a loving husband."

" I quite believe you," answered Watson ; " indeed I can truly say, that there is no one to whom both my wife and myself would so willingly commit our dear child. Come home and spend the evening with us, and you shall speak for yourself."

When they reached the farm, they found everything comfortably prepared for the evening meal ; but being rather before the usual hour of Watson's return, they were not expecting him. *In a few minutes, however, Mrs. Watson appeared.*

"Clara will be back directly," said she : "the seemed a little time to spare, and she thought she would just go through the wood, to see poor old Mrs. Bond, and take her a few fresh eggs. As she promised to be back by the time father returned, she will not fail."

"Aye, she's a good lass," answered Watson "it's seldom she's out of the way; but it's no matter; there's no hurry."

"I'll go and meet her," said Edward eagerly and instantly left the house.

Watson had long since told his wife what had passed. It was no surprise to her, for the growing attachment could not escape the mother's watchful eye, and she rejoiced, as well as Watson, at the prospect of their daughter's happiness.

Edward had crossed the whole length of the wood before Clara appeared. She was just closing the door of Mrs. Bond's cottage, as he came in sight of it. Never had he thought of her more engaging than at that moment. Her cheeks were glowing with kindly satisfaction at the pleasure she had been giving by her visit, and her empty basket told its own tale of benefits conferred. She looked rather surprised at seeing him; but her ready smile showed that his presence was not unwelcome.

"You are on the wrong way for home," said she.

"I am come to see *you* safe home," was his reply.

She was about to answer that "there was *little to fear in the wood*," when she was struck *with an unusual seriousness in his manner*, which

impressed her with a feeling that there was something of importance on his mind. They both walked on thoughtfully for some minutes. At last he said, "Clara, you have a very happy home, and great cause, indeed, to love it."

"Yes, truly!" answered she; "I should be very ungrateful if I did not. But why do you say this? you cannot doubt it?"

"No!" exclaimed Edward, with a sigh; "on the contrary, I was doubting if anything would induce you to leave it."

"It must be a *great* inducement that could make me willing to do so;" answered Clara, not at first understanding what he meant; on looking up, however, she saw his eyes fixed so earnestly upon her, that she was embarrassed. But she had no time to reflect; for he quickly said,

"Suppose it were possible for any one to love you more dearly even than your parents, could you make up your mind to leave them for another home?"

"Perhaps, if it were not very far off," answered Clara, too confused to know exactly what she was saying, "and—if I could feel quite sure that it was right to leave them."

"Suppose I had your father's consent?"

She was silent for a minute, doubtful if he was quite in earnest: but his repeated assurances satisfied her mind.

"Then I suppose you *must* have mine, too," said she gently, and with a sweet smile.

It may be easily imagined that the walk through the wood that evening seemed neither *long nor tedious*; on the contrary, the time was

only too short for Edward to tell how impatiently he had waited for this day; how the thought of her had mixed itself with all his daily business,—all his hopes and fears for the future. Clara could not but respond to his expressions of affection; for how could she fail to entertain a regard for one so good, and so truly attached to her? When they reached the farm, there was no need of words to inform Clara's parents how matters stood. Their happy looks, and the absence of that restraint, which had hitherto existed between them, clearly bespoke that his proposal had not been an unsuccessful one. The evening passed happily away.

The wedding was fixed for no distant day; for Watson felt that Edward had waited long enough. The mother's thoughts were now fully employed in preparing everything for the joyful occasion. Meanwhile Clara daily committed herself and all her hopes to God, in humble earnest prayer, that He would graciously direct them aright in all their ways, and that everything might be ordered, according to His Will, for the happiness of her father and mother, as well as for their own.

The news of the approaching wedding was soon spread abroad amongst the neighbours, who all rejoiced in Clara's happiness; for she was a general favourite. None took a more lively interest in it than Mr. Bernard and Miss Bentinck. The former gave them a large and handsomely-bound Bible and Prayer-book; these *were highly* valued, and destined to occupy *the chief place* among the few choice articles

which were to grace their sitting-room. Miss Bentinck's present was a nice work-box, well-filled with all things which could be needed by an industrious housewife, besides a few useful books, to afford them pleasing and instructive occupation in their leisure hours. Clara received also many pretty and useful little gifts from her former companions in the class.

All arrangements being at length made, we proceed to give some account of the day itself. It was a very happy one to all ; there was, indeed, nothing to dim its joy ; for, considering the short distance to which she was removing, she felt that it would scarcely be any separation from her parents. On their part, they rejoiced that they were not losing a daughter, but rather gaining a son, who could not but prove an additional comfort to them.

Many of their friends and neighbours accompanied them to church ; and the beautiful marriage-service, solemnly and reverently performed, stamped its holy impression upon the minds of all. The deep earnest tones of Mr. Bernard's voice sunk especially into the hearts of Edward and Clara, who could not fail to observe the interest he felt in them. The concluding blessing came home with a deep reality to their hearts : they left the church, feeling that they had entered into a new state of life, capable of being made a holy state, in which they might mutually help each other to walk in the ways of godliness.

As they approached the churchyard gate, some of the younger members of the class were *in waiting* with baskets of flowers to strew the

path of the bride, and a pretty sight it was: for the day was as bright as could be wished, and the children with their flowers no less so. Clara herself was admired by all for her neat and quiet dress, showing that she thought more of the importance of the occasion, than of the opportunity afforded for vanity and display.

The wedding party then returned to the farm, where the Watsons had provided a hospitable entertainment in the garden, to which many of their friends and neighbours were invited. It was a joyful day; and not till evening did the party disperse. Mr. and Mrs. Watson showed particular attention to Edward's father and mother, who had come over to witness their son's happiness, and pressed them to remain till the following day at Goodrest farm—an invitation which they gladly accepted.

Those who have followed the course of this narrative will, doubtless, wish to hear how the good resolutions, formed beforehand by Edward and Clara for their married life, were put in practice. From the very first they resolved to begin and end each day with family prayer, as the surest ground of hope for God's blessing upon their home. Edward had always something to attend to before breakfast. Clara, too, was fully occupied with the care of the poultry and dairy. By the time these morning duties were completed, Edward had generally come in to breakfast; and before they returned to the business of the day, Edward always read a few *verses out of the Bible* given to them by Mr. *Bernard*. We need not follow Clara through

all her household work, nor Edward over his farm; it is sufficient to say, that the business of the farm being well and heartily done, prospered in their hands. Their house was a model of good order and cleanliness in every part, as Clara had resolved it should be; Edward, too, now well versed in all farming knowledge, did full justice to the confidence which Mr. Brixham placed in him.

Some months after their marriage, Edward, who had always longed to have his father and mother under his roof, obtained Mr. Brixham's permission that they should come and live with them. The proposal was also warmly seconded by Clara: Mr. and Mrs. Merton gladly consented; and having disposed of their little farming stock, soon after became inmates of Brixham farm, to the great delight of Edward, who felt he could thus in some measure repay all their loving care of him from childhood. Old Merton was still able to take pretty active exercise, though now far advanced in years, and used to delight in following Edward, marking the progress of affairs under his charge, and helping him with his advice and experience. Clara treated Mrs. Merton with all possible tenderness and affection, which were the more required, as she was now becoming rather infirm. Both Edward's parents loved her as their own child, whilst she, on her part, rejoiced to do anything to help or please them. Sometimes, however, she fancied that her own dear mother might feel the want of her assistance; and, when she *went to see her*, she would tenderly enquire how

she managed without her. Mrs. Watson always assured her that she got on very well : but Clara could not rest till she had persuaded her to procure some help ; and having heard that Mary, the orphan-girl (who will be remembered as one of the class), had lately lost her kind mistress, and was in want of a place, she went at once in search of her ; and Mary was only too happy to be engaged. Mrs. Watson being thus more at liberty to leave home, was enabled to be oftener at Brixham farm than had been possible, whilst single-handed in her work. A frequent and pleasant intercourse was kept up between the two homes : indeed the inhabitants, though not actually living together, were like one family.

Edward Merton was the most unselfish of human beings ; there was an innate kindliness of temper, which is one of the highest ornaments of the Christian character ;—without which, indeed, we cannot be said to fulfil Christ's law of love. He had not forgotten his former friend, Tom Winks ; they now and then met in the market-town. Although a mutual reserve had for some time existed between them, Edward had good reason to know that Winks had become quite an altered character. He had, from the beginning, felt real sorrow for the distress, which the events of the Fair had occasioned to his father and mother, as well as ashamed of his own disgrace. His early religious impressions regained their influence over him : he not only determined to amend his ways, but by God's grace had strength to carry out *his good resolutions*, and to break off all *connection with his former idle companions*. Having

thus got rid of his chief temptation, he steadily devoted himself to helping his father in the shop, where he soon became a very useful assistant. Edward, seeing this happy change, and hearing from a friend that he still retained his regard for Lucy, the loss of whose affection had been a subject of deep grief to him, determined to try and bring about a reconciliation. He opened his mind to Watson, who was persuaded to call on Farmer Burton, and tell him how greatly Winks had changed for the better. Burton, who had heard something of Tom's amendment, promised Watson to make enquiries about him. This he did from those who knew him well; and was convinced that Edward's account of his improvement was well grounded; he therefore consented to his earnest request for Tom to come and plead his own cause. Meanwhile Lucy had been gently sounded by Clara, to learn the state of her mind towards him, and was found a willing listener to the account of his improved character. She had heard from others also how he had altered for the better; and her former feelings of regard pleaded on his behalf. Therefore, under her parents' sanction, she was well-prepared to give him a kind reception: and Edward and Clara soon had the satisfaction of seeing their two friends happily married like themselves.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COMPARISON.

It may well be supposed that the events related in the preceding chapter were full of interest to all the young people at Goodrest, and formed, for a time, the chief subject of their conversation. Miss Bentinck perceiving how much their minds were occupied in this direction, and wishing to turn it to some profit, chose one day for the reading-lesson of the class, the tenth chapter of St. Luke, containing the account of Our Blessed Saviour's visit to Mary and Martha at Bethany, when the one sat at His feet, and heard His words, while the other busied herself with over-much carefulness to serve him in outward things. Those beautiful verses, describing so vividly the whole scene, seem ever fresh, ever blessed. Mary is therein shown as a pattern to all ages of heavenly contemplation and devoted love. It was a fruitful subject for instruction, and Miss Bentinck pointed out to them, that it is the duty of all Christians to secure to themselves daily some space of time, however short, in which to sit like Mary at the Saviour's feet, and hear His words. She told them of several ways by which, even in the busiest life, this *might be managed*. "One of the surest," she *said*, "*is early rising ; you may thus fairly gain*

a little time to call your own; and after your usual morning prayers, would find it a great help and comfort to read a portion of Scripture, reverently asking a blessing on it, before you go forth to your daily duties. I would not advise you to read a whole chapter at once, especially if containing many subjects: but take a portion, ten or twelve verses perhaps, endeavouring to gain the real meaning and spirit of them. Think how you may apply them to your own life and character, and to your daily duties; then pray earnestly for strength to do so. Lay to heart also whatever promises, or encouragements to persevere, you may find in the verses, that you may recall them to mind sometimes during the day, when any trial or temptation overtakes you. You will thus be roused, and braced for action, like good Christian soldiers. This daily exercise will be, as it were, a polishing of your armour. You might first take some of the beautiful chapters of St. John, the beloved apostle, or any of our Lord's parables and discourses in the other gospels; and while you are thus, as it were sitting at His feet, hearing His words, with a devout, loving heart, you could not fail to gain continually increasing grace, and learn to live daily nearer to Him. In the same way you might go through St. Paul's Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, or Thessalonians, so full of glowing love to his converts, —holding up to us, in the lives of those early Christians, as therein described by him, such bright examples for our imitation. Once taste *the sweetness* of those inspired writings, and you

will soon learn to delight in the study of them. Many have thus learnt the precious secret how to

‘Carry music in their heart .
Through dusty lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls some holy strain repeat.’”

“Please ma’am,” said Rose, “I have often heard Margaret speak of a relation of hers (cousin Rachel) who is just such a one. She has had to support herself, and her poor old mother, by needle-work, and many an hour has she been obliged to steal from her night’s rest to do so. Early rising was her constant habit ; and this, she used often to say, gave her more time for thoughts of God and Heaven, and for learning parts of Scripture whilst at her work. You can’t think, ma’am, how much she knows by heart in this way. Once I asked her how ever she could do two things at the same time like that ; and she answered, ‘Oh, by a quick glance of the eye : I don’t like to sit with my mind empty, or running to waste ; so I comfort myself with reading God’s word, as I work, which gives me many pleasant thoughts, and helps me wonderfully.’”

“Yes,” answered Miss Bentinck, “I have heard of Rachel Miller, and seen her too : many a pleasant half-hour have I spent sitting beside her, while she was working, and never left her without feeling the better for many things she said,—lessons of humility and true devotion *unconsciously* let fall. Her attention to her aged *mother* was no less remarkable. Mrs. Miller,

during the last years of her life, was a great sufferer, and used sometimes to get rather fretful. Rachel would then leave off working, to make her comfortable; then, giving her a loving kiss, settle down again to her work; or, would sing a hymn so sweetly, as to make her mother forget her pains, in raising her thoughts to Heaven. To the last hour of Mrs. Miller's life, Rachel was her greatest comfort."

"Yes, indeed, ma'am," rejoined Rose; "the poor old woman used often to say, 'Really I don't know what I should have done without her; for beside being such a good daughter, she's a'most like a parson for reading.' But Rachel herself was never pleased to hear this said."

"No," answered Miss Bentinck, "I am sure of that; there was nothing she was more anxious for, than to secure their good pastor's promise to come and see her as often as he could. And who can tell the unspeakable consolation which she derived in her last hours from his pastoral ministrations? Rachel sorrowed much, though with resignation, for her mother; and felt very lonely after her death. She soon after adopted a little orphan niece, who had no other relation, able or willing to take charge of her, and she is now well repaid for her kindness. Emma is growing up, under her training, a good useful girl, and is already quite a companion to her. Taking pattern from her aunt's good practices, she seems likely to become some day as valuable a character. It is a real delight to see such instances of piety, and so fit a reward of self-denying charity; for in order to support this

little one, Rachel has been obliged to continue working almost as hard as during her mother's life-time, although some of her friends would have dissuaded her from doing so."

"Indeed, ma'am," continued Rose, "I think she is better than most. It was our reading this afternoon that reminded me of her, for she seems more like Mary, sitting at the Saviour's feet, and hearing His words, than any one else I know."

"Well, my dear girls," answered Miss Bentinck, "there is no reason why any of you should not in time become like her; and, though you have not yet the experience or ripeness of Christian character, so fully shown forth in Rachel, I have good hope that you are all in earnest; and if so, you may, by the help of Divine grace, become as good: indeed, in a measure, like the blessed Mary in the Gospel, who sat at Jesus' feet."

"I'm very glad to hear you say so, ma'am," observed Ellen, (now for the first time joining in the conversation): "yet I doubt whether I should like to be a Mary so well as an active, busy Martha."

"We may combine the good qualities of both," answered Miss Bentinck. "Mary's lot was certainly a most blessed one: but there must be many active Marthas in the world, or the business of life would come to a stand still. Both states have their advantages and opportunities of good: both will receive the Divine approval, if *rightfully* fulfilled. In either case we can testify *our love to Christ*, by making others happy. *I rather dwell especially on the blessedness of*

Mary's life, because it is often undervalued. It is too much the tendency of young people in the present day to think that the great object in life is to get married—so much so, that they fancy it is impossible to be happy otherwise, and this often leads them to form hasty ill-judged matches, too likely to be 'repented of at leisure.'

"If girls who have comfortable homes and kind parents, or those in service who have good situations, would duly consider their present blessings and advantages, they would not be in such a hurry to exchange them for what constantly proves to be no better than a place of all-work, having the house, cooking, washing, and all to do themselves, besides half-a-dozen crying children to look after at the same time,—often, too, a hard discontented master in the husband they have chosen. I do not mean to say that this *need* be the case; for if a young woman takes pains to ascertain beforehand the character of the man, with whom she is about to cast in her lot for life—to make sure, in the first place, that he is a good Christian man, sober, and good-natured, the cottage-home *may* present a very different scene. She *may*, indeed, have to work hard, and be troubled with the children; but if she has learned how to keep her own temper, she will train *theirs* aright, and will take pains to have everything clean and comfortable for her husband, on his return home; she will then be cheered and rewarded by his affection and content.

"There is another point, too—not an unimportant one, though much overlooked. Before *young people* think of setting up house, they

should save up their earnings carefully for some years, and so acquire fixed habits of self-denial and economy. They will thus be able to furnish their cottage without 'going on trust,' which brings so much trouble to many, and start clear of debt. What a working man gains is seldom much more than enough to pay the rent and the ordinary expenses, though, with good management, they might put by *something* weekly during the first few years of their marriage, against the time when they may have several children to provide for; and if they have been prudent beforehand, and left a few pounds in the Savings'-bank, they will have something to fall back upon in times of trial, sickness, or other misfortunes, such as all must expect. But I did not mean to draw a doleful picture of cottage life," added Miss Bentinck, smiling, observing the long faces of some of her young people during the description of the difficulties they must look forward to; "I only wish you to think reasonably of your present happy freedom from care, and realize the amount of responsibility you will take upon yourselves whenever you change your state of life, that you may weigh all things in a true and even balance, and know how to judge wisely."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CLOSING SCENE.

NOT long after the foregoing conversation, Mary came to Miss Bentinck with a message from Clara, saying that the hay-field adjoining the farm-house was just ready to carry ; but before it was cleared she much wished to invite all her former friends, belonging to the class, to a hay-party under the old oak-tree. Mr. Bernard had called in the day before, and hearing of the plan, kindly said he should like to come too, with which, of course, Edward and Clara were delighted. "And so, ma'am," added Mary, "they thought they might venture to ask you also ; it would be such a pleasure to them and to us all, if you will join the party." Miss Bentinck readily consented, and the next evening saw her as punctual to the appointed time as any of the young people.

The happy group included all the members of the class ; nor was Lucy forgotten, for an afternoon in the country was now a great treat to her. Tom, too, had contrived to make holiday. Farmer Burton and Watson having both cleared their hay-fields the day before, were thus set free to join the youthful party, and made their appearance in good time for tea. Mrs. Burton had come earlier in the afternoon with Mrs. Watson, to help Clara in her preparations ; so

that on the arrival of the company, all was ready and nicely arranged under the old oak-tree. Mr. Bernard had been detained a little longer than he expected by some pressing business; but he arrived in time for the principal act of the feast, to which all were looking forward with great interest; for just then in came Farmer Burton, leading his handsomest cow, adorned with a garland of flowers, and Mary in attendance, with her shining milk-pail, and her little stool ready; and there was Edward Merton with the other ingredients for a grand syllabub, for which Clara had provided her largest, choicest bowl.

It was a lovely evening, and the balmy air of July wafting around the scent of the fresh hay filled all hearts with joy. A broad ridge of hay had been piled round the tea-table, which was spread with Clara's best table-cloth of snowy whiteness. The party now assembled round the rustic feast; and after Mr. Bernard had said grace, sat down to regale themselves with the good cheer before them. The syllabub was the great attraction; but dishes well-piled, some with strawberries, others with various cakes, added to the treat. When tea was over, a clearance was soon made by the younger members of the party, all willing to make themselves useful; after which it was proposed to have a game of hunt the hare, in and out among the hay-cocks, which stood like tempting marks for their fun, *dotted about the field, and ready to be carried to the stackyard.* Tom willingly offered himself *to be hare,* and vigorously was he pursued by

many acting the part of hounds, calling forth repeated appeals, on his part, for fair play.

While the young people were thus amusing themselves in their own way, Mr. Bernard and the elder ones had been engaged in friendly talk on various subjects, interesting alike to all. At length, Mr. Bernard (whose mind seemed always tending towards some higher point) rose up and said, "Let us go towards the upper end of the field: I know there is a lovely view from yonder rising ground, and that venerable old cedar-tree stretches its arms so invitingly."

"Aye, sir," answered Edward, "I much wished to have the tea spread there, for it is a lovely spot; the view seems quite to cheer one's heart,—smiling corn-fields to be seen in every direction, and all the country in full beauty: but Clara truly said it was too far from the house to carry all the things."

"Never mind, we can make amends by enjoying it now," said Mr. Bernard; "the sun is not yet gone down, and we shall still, I think, see it set gloriously."

They soon reached the spot, from whence the view was indeed a striking one. It was a favourite resort of the inhabitants of the farm; but never had it seemed to them so enjoyable as now, when, with their good pastor seated among them, they were thus quietly and happily spending the last hour of that sweet summer's day. The young ones were by this time tired of their frolics, and gladly bent their steps also to the old cedar-mount, and the whole party were soon seated in groups beneath its shade.

The discourse had turned on various forest-trees ; their comparative beauty, strength, durability, and usefulness, with which the rural worthies, who formed the elder portion of the party, were well acquainted. "After all," said Mr. Bernard, "none can compare with this fine old cedar. Besides the sacred associations which its very name always brings to mind, as being a native of fair Lebanon, in the Holy Land, there is something peculiarly grand in its straight majestic growth, its firm-knit massy trunk, its top ever aspiring towards Heaven, its wide-spreading graceful branches thickly clothed with ever-green ; and, last not least, its strong, firm roots, extending as far beneath the soil, as its branches do above, and giving sure promise of resistance to the power of wind and storm ;—as a proof of which, there is good reason to believe that several of the gigantic cedars, still growing on Mount Lebanon, existed in the time of Our Lord, some even say in the days of Solomon. It may well represent to our minds, that 'Great Tree' of the 'Kingdom of Heaven,'* (as Christ taught His disciples to call the Gospel Kingdom) in the shadow of which all creatures should find a refuge. Is not that gracious promise abundantly fulfilled to us in His holy Church, wherein we find a safe home, a shelter in all trials ? Like the 'fowls of the air,' we may securely 'lodge in the branches thereof.' Though sprung apparently from so small a beginning as *a grain of mustard-seed*, it soon spread by Divine *power throughout all lands.*

* Matt. xiii. 31, 32.

“But we may bring home the application still more nearly to ourselves. *We* also are compared in scripture to trees, ‘the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.’* It is said by the mouth of holy David, ‘The righteous shall flourish like a palm-tree, and shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.’† ‘Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.’‡ And again, ‘He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.’§ But it is only the righteous who are thus spoken of; ‘the ungodly are not so.’|| They are compared by the prophet Jeremiah to ‘the degenerate plant of a strange vine,’¶ and by Our Lord Himself to ‘a corrupt tree’ which ‘bringeth forth evil fruit;’** and such God disowns; for Christ again says, ‘Every plant which my Heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up,’†† and ‘every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire;’‡‡ fearful contrast with the lot of the righteous! Who would not wish to have his place among the blessed of the Lord? Great and striking are the examples given us in Holy Writ of some, who seemed goodly to look upon, and as it were glorious trees, but who, bringing forth fruit only to themselves, and towering upward in their own vain and foolish

* Isaiah lxi. 3.

† Psalm xcii. 13, 14.

‡ Psalm

§ Psalm i. 3.

|| Psalm i. 4.

¶ Jeremiah ii. 21.

** Matt. vii. 18.

†† Matt. xv. 13.

‡‡ Matt. vii. 19.

ambition, were 'brought down and laid low, even with the ground.' Such was Nebuchadnezzar, shown even to himself in a vision as a great and strong tree, 'whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation.'* But because he was haughty and presumptuous, and trusted in himself, and did not glorify the God of Heaven, Who had exalted him to such a station, he saw in the vision 'a watcher and an Holy One coming down from Heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down and destroy it,' which accordingly came to pass in his humiliation; so that nothing was left but disgrace instead of glory; nothing remained of the great tree but 'the stump of the roots thereof in the earth.'†

"This is, indeed, a warning also to us. We all are the trees of the Lord; but let us abide in humility, where He has planted us, deriving nourishment from the 'still waters,' amid the green pastures which His love has provided for us. Let us not be restless or disquieted, seeking for more than He has given, or aiming to exalt ourselves; but rather be content to grow as He would have us, and so shall we flourish like 'a green olive tree in the house of our God.'‡

* Daniel iv. 20, 21.

† Dan. iv. 23. See also Ezek. xxxi. 3—14.

‡ Psalm liii. 8.

He has restored us, as it were to Paradise, by planting us into His Church, in the midst of which is the Tree of Life—Jesus, our Saviour, the True Vine,* as He Himself declares. The fruit, which is holiness brought to perfection by His grace, imparts a Divine sweetness to all His other blessings even in this life. Into this living tree we must all be engrafted—nay, are already engrafted, having been made in our baptism members of Christ. Apart from the True Vine we should be lifeless; but we derive a vigorous growth from the sap of the life-giving Tree. Therein abiding, we become fruitful branches: but let us take heed lest our inward life decay, and that come to pass, of which our Lord forewarns us,—that we be ‘cast forth as a branch and withered.’ This is the whole ‘ROOT OF THE MATTER,’ that we ‘being rooted and grounded in love’ to Him, and to our brethren, may indeed be ‘found in Him’ at the last day.”

Even the younger members of the party had listened attentively to Mr. Bernard’s impressive words: all had been much interested. He explained to them how we are surrounded on all sides by types or symbols of the life of grace, to stimulate our zeal, and brighten our hopes of the invisible world. Their attention was now turned to the setting sun, which was gilding the western sky with hues of unspeakable loveliness. It was a scene more calculated to inspire adoring thoughts than one for many words; but when, after a

* John xv.

silence of some minutes, during which they all intently watched its gradual departure, it finally sank beneath the horizon, Mr. Bernard exclaimed, "Ah! glorious, indeed, is such a sight; glorious each ray and golden streak! Though now to *our* sight it seems to fail and fade away, yet in itself it remains the same, its glory undimmed, its lustre unabated. It still travels on its majestic course, and leaving us, passes on to enlighten distant regions of the world. Others are even now gladdened by its rising beams; and we again in our turn, after a short space of darkness, shall in like manner welcome his return. If then, we so rejoice in this orb of reflected light, how should we look forward to the glorious coming again of that eternal Sun of Righteousness Who will arise in the Great Day of everlasting brightness, when He will appear as a fire to consume His enemies; —but the light, the joy, the unending glory and reward of those who have trusted in Him, lived to Him, and loved Him.

Mr. Bernard was one who at all times had much influence over his people, and, indeed, over all with whom he conversed, from the simple earnestness of his manner, enhanced and borne out by his quiet, consistent, Christian life. But on this occasion, there was an especial tenderness in his manner, as he looked around on so many young members of his flock, just entering upon life; and on the other hand, some elder ones, who were drawing nigh to the end of their *earthly sojourn*. They especially felt the full *force of his glowing appeal*. His words had

sunk deep, and strengthened many a good purpose to *abide* grounded and settled. They might be said to have discovered the Root of THE MATTER—the real secret of life, the only hope and sure anchor of the soul, namely, the all-importance of a living union with Christ, and indwelling in Him, the True Vine, our only Saviour and Redeemer.

THE END.

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